

# AN AGE OF INNOCENCE

by

MTI Class 8099 (2018-2020)  
School of Foreign Studies  
Xi'an Jiaotong University  
Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province  
The People's Republic of China



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&

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# INTRODUCTION

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ome say youth is like a moving poem, using words to record time's flight. Some say youth is like a sweet song, using melodies to represent youthful energy. Life is like a parabola. Youth is like a path pointing to dreams. We are fortunate that on the way we meet can record golden moments in this age of innocence.

Students in Class 8099 of MTI met in Xi'an City. This book collects essays we wrote for our Speech and Writing Class with Dr. K.

## 前言

有人说青春是一首动人的诗，字里行间写满岁月的青葱；青春是抛物线，每一个起承转合，都风生了五味杂陈的心思。青春是一条一往无前的路，沿途有你，精彩故事记录在我们的纯真时代。

硕8099MTI专业有缘相识于长安，谨以此书纪念我们外教课的点点滴滴。

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# ESSAYS



安旭飞  
An Xufei  
Andy

---

**D**o you know the famous Chinese actor and singer Andy Lau? I think the inspiration of his English name was originally from mine. Just kidding! Because the pronunciation of my family name is "An" I chose Andy as my English name.

I come from Dingxi City, Gansu Province, which is located in northwest China. I graduated from Southern Medical University in Guangzhou. As for my major, I like medical English, which is one reason I came here to study with you guys. I am the youngest, but not a spoiled child in my family. I have three elder sisters and they all take care of me. I am very lucky and happy to live and spend time with them.

My favorite sports are volleyball, basketball and running. I especially like volleyball. When I studied at university, I was captain of the volleyball team in the school of foreign studies.


We always played together with other members from different schools so if you have similar hobbies, welcome to join me and we can play together.

I dreamed a lot when I was very little: being an astronaut, a teacher, a writer, and so on. etc. But as I gradually grew up, I realized that some of my dreams were too far for me. I admired those great astronauts, but I actually cannot become one of them for many factors, for example, my poor sight. And now, as I am majoring in English translation and interpretation, I will spare no effort to practice more on English and try to learn it well. I wish we can all make progress in our studies and fulfill our dreams in the near future.



## COLORFUL TEACHING METHODS CREATE A HARMONIOUS CLASS

---

y roommates are recently discussing what kind of learning environment best benefits students. Finally, we agreed that a teacher's function is critical. One of my mates holds that those who teach seriously and strictly are best. Others think that an entertaining, easygoing teacher is students' favorite.

Teachers who use entertaining methods in classes and create more interest and interactions among students will benefit students a lot. When students are more actively participating in class, they will make progress quickly. On the contrary, teachers who teach with no passion and standing far from their students, then students might have little interest nor curiosity about the class. As a consequence, teachers lose courage, and students are bored and do not try to think during class.

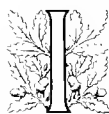
Society nowadays is very different from the old days. Humanistic teaching styles are more likely to be accepted. Teachers who are open, tolerant, and close to their students are more welcomed and loved. Teachers and students should behave like friends.

However, there is a limit to entertainment: Class discipline should be maintained. Rules and orders must be followed, especially by students who intend to make trouble. Over-entertainment harms students.

Students hope our teachers are kind and teach with openness and entertainment, but an ideal result depends both on the teachers and students themselves. Only when the two sides cooperate in a friendly and positive manner can we make progress and achieve our dreams.

## SAYING "THANK YOU" TO THE WORLD

---

 I witnessed a quarrel on a bus the day before yesterday, as I was on my way to a part-time job. An old man standing inside the bus, held a handle tightly as the bus rushed and stopped. Several stations later, one seat was available, though a bit far from him. The grey-haired man walked quickly towards the seat, trying to sit but failed because a young lady ahead him. The old man angrily said, "It's my seat. I stood for almost 20 minutes. I am eighty years old. Eighty!"

The young lady stood up quickly, offered her seat and said innocently, "Sorry I did not notice you were coming. I was near, so I sat down."

The old man impatiently shouted, "Enough! I don't want to hear your explanation! What kind of human quality do you have!"

The lady's female friend then could not help but shriek, "What kind of human quality do we have? Who decreed that we must offer our seats to you? Do we have a responsibility to do that? We paid the same as you!"


The quarrel continued for several minutes and both sides held their arguments. After being persuaded by the driver and passengers, they all quieted down before I got off the bus.

I don't want to decide who was wrong. If the old man had said "Thank you" to the young lady when he got the seat, it would have seen different. The situation would not have become so acrimonious.

A "Thank you" to others requires little. What really matters is if we are willing and brave enough to say it. When we are served by the staff in our student canteen, do we thank them for their work and respect their service? Do we show our gratitude and thanks to teachers and roommates for their support? Should we thank those who remember and keep in touch with us? Smile often to others, you will find they always give you feedback with smiles. Say thank you often and you will find that those around you are kind and reliable and the world is more beautiful and meaningful.

## THE GIRL, VOLLEYBALL, AND ME

---

 I loved a girl secretly for almost three years while we were classmates at college. She was a little shy, especially when met strangers or, the boy she liked.

She was very beautiful with long hair, and Mickey Mouse was her favorite doll. She wore a pair of black-frame glasses. The first time I noticed her was before a volleyball game. It was volleyball that made us closer. We often played volleyball together after class, despite the rainy or sunny weather. Each time we stopped playing, our clothes were drenched with sweat. Although I was tired and wanted to do nothing else but rest, I was happy in my heart because I had spent time with the girl I liked, though she might have known nothing about it. After playing volleyball, we would go together looking for food in our students' canteen. We ate, drank, and talked about our dreams in the future.

Today she is working in a small town near her village, trying to earn a living by herself. I am studying far away, still pursuing my dreams. With too much to do every day, we rarely go to the volleyball court.

The other day, we chatted on WeChat. She suggested I cherish the valuable learning time at school and grasp the opportunities well. At that moment I could not help thinking the beautiful memories when we were spending together.

Then at one night, I told her that I have fallen in love with her for long time. Hearing this, she was not that surprised as I expected but smiled happily, agreeing to be my girlfriend and would company me for all the lifetime. I was so excited and moved that I could not help bursting out laughing, holding her tightly in my arms, only found that was just a dream, a beautiful dream...



白鸽  
Bai Ge  
Jessie

---

**M**y name is Bai Ge, which is a combination of Father's family name and Mother's first name. I live in the capital city of Shaanxi Province - Xi'an. It's a famous ancient city with rich historical relics, including the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, Terracotta Warriors, and the Bell Tower. I'm an only child. In the 1990s the one-child policy was strictly enforced. My parents also agree that raising a child is time-consuming, so one is enough. Mom and Dad give all their love and care to me, and they stand behind me every time I need them, no matter if my requirement is fixing a pen or participating in the National Model United Nation Conference in New York.

I spent six years in the Northwestern Polytechnical University Affiliated Middle School, which is one of the top middle schools in China. I studied hard every day in order to get good scores in the college entrance exam. I had a hard time

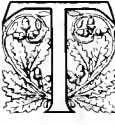
competing with my classmates, but I appreciated the time we spent together, studying, discussing, and laughing.

My performance in the college entrance examination was not so great. Northwestern Polytechnical University was the best I could enter. So, I spent four years in there as an English major and successfully graduated with bachelor degree. I was lucky to live with three sweet, polite, and considerate young ladies in the same room. In four years, we encouraged each other before exams, played mahjong after group presentations, and enjoyed chatting on various topics.

Now I'm an MTI student at Xi'an Jiaotong University, learning and practicing to equip myself with knowledge and skills to better suit the job market. I hope to become an interpreter. Though this job is energy-consuming, I am ready for experience of being a professional interpreter, living a busy and challenging life while I'm young.

## A SCRATCH

---

he scratch on that middle-aged man's forearm was bloody and noticeable. He knew other passengers at the bus station were staring at him, or maybe, laughing at him. Cats don't have such big claws.

"They will believe it's because of a cat," he comforted himself. "That's common sense. Everyone knows how ferocious cats can be."

The man next to him was whispering to his wife with his mouth covered. This couple avoided eye contact with each other. The husband simply raised his jaw towards that scratch, in order to guide his wife's eyes to the right place. The woman curled her lips to restrain herself from laughing loudly, crossed her hands in front of her breast, and whispered back with a mysterious smile. There was no need to cover one's mouth while whispering. Real whispers wouldn't be heard. Otherwise it was exactly what the whisperers want.

"Maybe I should pet a cat," he thought.

Waves of heat stroke his skin. Sweat oozed out of pores, stinging his scratch.

"Or maybe not. I should have divorced her long ago. I'm tired of covering new scratches and lying to myself. Who would be so stupid as to believe this is a cat scratch? I don't deserve such humiliation," he thought.

Soon, Bus No. Sixteen came. He found a seat in a corner, wondering what his colleagues would think about him when they saw the scratch. Different from passersby, colleagues might poke fun at him for a longer time, though, they did respect him for being an experienced news proofreader.

"When did things start to change? She is short-tempered, though there is no love in this marriage, she used to be reasonable," he sighed, huddled in his seat, rubbed his head, feeling like sitting on pins and needles.

He had been admired for being the first one in his family who entered a good university, and who had successfully settled in Xi'an city through his own hard work. However, nothing could change the fact that his marriage with that hysterical woman had been a tragedy. He believed he was

determined to divorce. Few days ago, his daughter told him that she was too tired to deal with a home where wars might begin for any trivial matters.

He got off the bus and walked to his workplace. Suddenly, his phone rang. It was his eighty-year-old mother. As usual, she just wanted to chat and know about his life.

## DEMON ANGELS

---

**U**niform, ponytail, schoolbag. She was a primary school student who could be no more than eight. A lock of her hair was wet with tears. While she was weeping, her mom, a woman around thirty-five, suddenly poked her forehead, and then pushed her to the ground.

Was that me eighteen years ago? Falling on the stairs after being kicked, with messy hairs and swollen eyes, feeling a biting pain in my knees but not daring to cry out? How humiliating.

"Do you dare! Am I mistreating you? Look at yourself! How can such a useless disappointing creature be my daughter! You live in my home and eat my food. I don't want to see your stupid face again so just get ready to spend the night outside"

I rushed over to lift her up. She raised her head and looked into my eyes with dim pupils, full of shock and panic, like a fawn that had just escaped from a lion. She curled and bit her lips, trying to stop two streaming from her orbits.

"Thank you," she murmured.

"Are you paralyzed? Why didn't you stand up by yourself?" Her mom yelled, stretching a hand over me trying to poke her daughter again. "Don't act in front of me or I beat you to death."

"I'm so sorry to trouble you," she whimpered. Her ivory face grew paler in extreme panic.

"Sorry if she bumped you," the woman said to me. "I'm educating her. Her teacher told me she was absentminded in class."

No one deserves to be treated like that on the street. No one deserves to suffer from domestic violence.

When I was three years old, I got my first beating from Mom. The reason was "you eat too slowly in kindergarten." In a taxi, she pulled my hair, slapped my head, and pinched my arms, while scolding me in the most malicious way. I was then physically abused from time to time. The reason varied from "eating snacks offered by a classmate" to "finishing homework



slowly." I can't count how many times she abused me for tiny mistakes, or for not doing what she wished. Every time she raised her hand, Dad would stop her from hitting me, if he was there. However, Dad worked at night as a newspaper editor, so he was often absent when I was assaulted. Since no umbrella was with me, I had to face the storm alone.

When I grew older, Mom reduced her beating. I thought I was no longer scared of her, only to later realize that all my nightmares had one common devil.

"Give up," she said, "You know it's useless. I have found you and always know where to find you."

"I'm not hiding from anyone."

"You are! Otherwise why would you be so nervous?"

"Because you are chasing me for no reason..."

Then the devil, which looked exactly like Mom, would stab a dagger into my belly, slap my face in public, or threw me off a cliff. This demon, this imaginary enemy was also the one I should trust, the one who never abandoned me, the one who loved me the most.

"Maybe you can explain to her the importance of concentration. She's still young. She's a good girl and will listen to you." I said, trying to calm the woman. "Look at that innocent little face. She couldn't be rebellious," I thought.

"I'm afraid she won't remember this lesson," said the woman in a low voice. "We all get beaten when we were young, right?"

"Right. But things don't have to be like that," I replied. Perhaps I shouldn't interfere with a stranger. Perhaps the little girl was doomed to suffer like me. Perhaps she would learn how to face her mom better than me...

"Let's go home," the woman bellowed at her daughter. "I don't want to lose face scolding you in public."

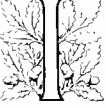
"You already did, though. It's not about losing face, it's about treating your child like a human being and respecting her dignity," I thought

When the child passed me, following her mom, she whispered, "Thank you."

"Hope you won't be another me, little angle," I murmured to myself.

## LAO HAN

---

 was anxious when I was alone at home, but not after I was five years old because of my maternal grandfather, Han Jiliang, whom I called Lao Han (Old Han).

Mom told me that when I was two years old, she sent me to her parents in the countryside for about three months, since I was too little to go to kindergarten. She and Dad couldn't take care of me while they were working. Mom said I was quite well-behaved with Lao Han. I never doubted that because I remember how he used to take me to the market and stop at the breakfast stalls asking what I wanted for breakfast. Six out of ten times my answer was buttered tea. I hated porridge, steamed buns, dumplings, and bread, but I loved buttered tea for its thick, salty taste. He and Grandmother were the only persons who wouldn't scold me for my picky attitude, I like that. From Grade One to Grade Four, I spent every weekend with them in the countryside, enjoying the fresh air, charming scenery, and their boundless love.

Once when I was about five, I woke up at late night, and realize that no one was at home. I dialed Lao Han's phone number because Mom's cellphone number was too long to remember. I was crying as if I had been abandoned. Lao Han assured me he would come to my home immediately.

"But there is no more shuttle bus at night," I fretted.

"There are many ways. Your home is not so far so I and your Grandma can come by motorbike. We are always with you. Haven't you seen your uncle's new motorbike? We are going to ride it."

I calmed down soon imagining their packing and coming to me. Actually, after receiving my call, Lao Han called his daughter and ordered her to return and never, ever leave me alone like that. When Mom rushed back, she apologized for leaving for something really urgent, and described how Lao Han had scolded her. I was amused because Mom was strict with me so it was such a joy to see Lao Han criticize her. Later, I had the courage to be alone. I also later understood it was impossible for Lao Han to come fifty kilometers by motorbike,

but I still believed he would come magically whenever I needed him.

A conflict broke out when Grandma fell seriously ill in 2011. Mom's brothers refused to continue treatment, though my family insisted on doing so and declared we were ready to rent a small apartment in Xi'an and hire nurses to help care for her. In rural areas, a daughter becomes a stranger to the original family once she marries. Her family has no duty to help her, nor is she required to be active in family issues. This opinion is backward but deeply rooted. We could only mourn after Grandma's death.

Lao Han was lonely and suffered from Alzheimer's disease after a cerebral hemorrhage in 2013. He slowly became unable to recognize those around him. Mom was deeply disappointed by her brothers and seldom visited after losing her mom. I knew she never wanted to escape her responsibility. It was the feeling of helplessness that really hurt her. Since she was ignored, she could only stop worrying about Lao Han, focus on our family, and pretend everything was fine.

I visited Lao Han once or twice a year, silently and with a sense of guilt. He had accompanied me when I needed him, but I was absent when he was alone. He knew I had graduated from high school, gone to a good university, passed the Test for English Majors, and so on. He passed away last summer, on one of Xi'an's hottest days.

I no longer drink buttered tea. I don't want to recall the time I sat on Lao Han's bicycle en route to the buttered tea stall. No one will ask me what I want for breakfast now. I can eat whatever I want.



陈楚璠  
Chen Chufan  
Amanda

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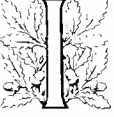
 I'm Chen Chufan, from Fuzhou, Fujian Province. I graduated from Central South University in Changsha, Hunan Province.

Fujian is a pretty traditional place. Fujianese attach great importance to traditional culture, especially tea drinking, which is important in my life. In ancient China, tea ceremonies, incense burning, *guqin* (a musical instrument), *weiqi* (traditional Chinese chess with black and white pieces), brush calligraphy, and Chinese water-and-ink painting have been long considered to be an integration. These arts served as the starting point for me to know more deeper about China's culture, history, and philosophy. During the next year, I'm going to finish the MD program here in Xi'an and an international exchange program in Australia. Then I'll find a job in Beijing where I can enjoy all of my favorites, especially Peking Opera and cross-talk show. I have also begun to write novels and posted online for two years. I started my small

business on it this year, which is a studio to make my writings into real books and sell them to my followers online. In the next few years, I will continue this job and try to enlarge it.

## FESTIVE FUNERAL

---

 returned to my native village for my paternal grandfather's funeral in Fujian Province. It was far from cities, surrounded by mountains and a seashore.

My parents and I took a bus from Fuzhou, the provincial capital, to Lianjiang County, and then changed to a shuttle bus along winding mountain roads. Next, a relative drove us from the town to the village. The village streets were too narrow for a car so we walked to the house.

My maternal grandmother had told me countless time that my home village was very traditional and even backward. It took a few days to complete the funeral preparations after I reached the village because of the complexity of local ritual.

The funeral began with an elder clan member's oration. He spoke in dialect and I understood nothing. After the speech, all the clan members knelt in the mourning hall in the big sitting room of my paternal grandparents' house.

I was bored.

It was meaningless to ask me to mourn for I had only met my paternal grandfather two or three times and had never talked to him because I was unable to understand his dialect. "Paternal Grandfather" seemed to be something I should have, but I didn't. So I began to observe every detail of the house. It looked like one in the TV series on CCTV1 at eight PM. The house consisted of three small rooms: a big sitting room with two wing rooms on both sides as storage rooms, a bedroom, and a room that was always locked (I had never entered this one). There were small courtyards between each two rooms. This was a typical building design in the old days in Fujian. Everything was old and shabby.

We knelt for almost one hour. Before resting, we were informed that the formal funeral the next day required us to kneel from six in the morning to ten in the evening. I could hardly stand after this hour of kneeling.

The next morning, I chose a pair of baggy pants and used two thick sanitary napkins as kneepads.

"What are you doing?" Mom said. She felt it was strange, but then did the same after I explained.

We went to the mourning hall. A straw mat lay on the floor for kneeling. Since older times, Chinese people followed the tradition of Pi Ma Dai Xiao 披麻戴孝 'wearing clothes made of grass, and a thin white cloth on the head at funerals to show respect for the dead'. This old tradition is considered backward and now ignored by most Chinese mainly due to the Po Si Jiu 破四旧 'breaking down the old rules' campaign during the Cultural Revolution, but the campaign had little influence in such a small village in remote and mountainous areas. According to tradition, Mom, Dad, Uncle, Uncle's wife and my male younger cousin were considered inside family members. They wore Ma clothes with a thin white cloth on their heads, and knelt in the front of the hall. Other relatives and I, who were considered outside family members (I was a girl), wore white clothes and knelt behind them.

A group of people who offered religious services came.

We should have invited monks from the temple, but nowadays, local businessmen offered a package funeral service, including religious rites, a band for a funeral parade, and other relative services. This was considered to be more convenient and economical. All the locals chose this service and so did Dad.

The religious specialists were mostly young men aged twenty to thirty. They had a couple of bags containing cassocks, musical instruments, sound equipment, microphones, wires and so on. When the rite began, these young men put on cassocks and chanted prayers in dialect or in some language I had no ideas about with a microphone.

I knelt in the center of the hall, feeling tired and sleepy. It was earlier than six AM and the rite would last until ten PM or so. Torture. Seeing all these clan members kneeling in the mourning hall, I felt I should behave seriously in this rite so as not to make Dad embarrassed. I knelt and began to recite all I had reviewed the previous days to kill time, since the College Entrance Exam was coming. But the chanting and the background music were very noisy and unpleasant so it was hard for me to concentrate.

The rite would pause for fifteen minutes every forty-five minutes. At that time, the rite specialists took off their

cassocks, revealing T-shirts with golden dragons or punk-style logos and sit somewhere, manipulating their cellphones.

I felt a little jealous. They could sit but I had to kneel and I was not allowed to have a cellphone in those days because Mom held that cellphones destroyed good students.

These rite specialists put on their cassocks and chanted then took off the cassocks and manipulated their cellphones. These went on again and again. I was totally exhausted and almost couldn't walk to where we stated at night.

Early the next morning, all the clan members had a funeral parade through the village with a band playing loud funeral music like thunder all along the way and then carried Grandfather's corpse to the crematorium. I felt much better that day since walking was easier than kneeling.

At noon, a funeral feast was to be held in the clan temple, a rather empty old building consisting of a large space for traditional rites and clan conferences and a kitchen with big pots that could cook for all the clan members. I stepped into the temple and felt curious about everything. On the stone walls of the clan temple, the clan tree was inscribed. It all looked like something in a TV series, but here they were in my own life. I liked this place with the history and culture of my clan and my family. It was solemn and quiet. My name carved on the wall made me feel connected to my clan. Thanks to the one-child policy, I was Dad's only child, so my name was carved. According to tradition, daughters didn't deserve to be listed in the clan tree.

When the feast was ready, all the clan members and their close friends and neighbors came and took their seats. I was given a pair of chopsticks, then suddenly heard very loud music with noisy beats. I had no idea what was happening and felt surprised.

A sexy-looking young woman walked to the center of the clan temple and said hello to everyone over a crackly, loud microphone. Then there were performances with noisy disco music. I recognized that the performers - they were band members from the funeral parade. The first performance was a dance show by four young women wearing bikinis.

I was totally astonished by what I was seeing and hearing. The sad atmosphere of the funeral still clung to me. The



ridiculous scene in front of me was beyond my imagination and understanding. I was shocked and turned to Mom. "What?" I said, almost shouting because the music was so loud.

Mom was as shocked as I, and also had no idea. She found one of my aunts to ask and returned to tell me a completely new phrase, "festive funeral".

"Your grandfather was more than eighty when he died. That's a long life, so the tradition is to hold a festive funeral," she said.

"But this is too much!" I said in astonishment.

Now a man was singing "Qinghai-Tibet Plateau" in a high pitch and the audience was lively and happy. I believed such should be absent from a funeral.

Mom said, "Your aunt said these are part of the package funeral service. We chose the service, so now we have to take it all."


"What?" I said.

I felt so bad about the scene that I dropped my chopsticks, crept out of the temple, and wandered in the village. According to tradition, my paternal grandmother shouldn't participate in or attend her husband's funeral. Maybe Mom had told me the reason, but I had no interest in it or I forgot.

I thought it was best that my paternal grandmother did not come.

## "LATER!"

---

 friend recommended that I teach primary school students in a Care Center when I was a sophomore at university. Finishing my class at three-forty PM, I took a bus to the working place. It was a Care Center for primary school students. Every weekday, after classes ended, teachers from the Care Center took students from their primary school to the Center. We teachers were responsible for supervising and urging them to finish their homework.

I took a bus for half an hour and spent forty minutes looking for the specific place. I checked the E-map on my smartphone, and still almost got lost. It was an old residential area with weather-stained, colorless buildings of the 1970s' style. Numerous alleys did not appear on the E-map app. All the buildings looked similar.

I called the Center manager for help. Following her directions, I walked back and found an ordinary stone stairway that led to another alley. I thought the Care Center would be in a small building with beautiful decorations and furniture. Actually, the Center was in an apartment on the third floor in one of the old buildings.

As I approached the stairs, an old woman gazed at me. I felt it was weird to be gazed at by a stranger, so I quickly went up the stairs. Maybe she felt it was weird to see a young, strange woman in front of the building where she lived.

The Center consisted of three bedrooms, a sitting room, a kitchen, and a toilet. I entered and the manager, a middle-aged woman, met me. She introduced two female cooks, five teachers, and sixty students from grades one to six.

These kids differed in character and age. They did have something in common - they all had busy parents who had no time or energy for them and who were unable to help them study. Most were taken home by their grandparents after finishing their homework. And the others slept in another apartment on the sixth floor in the same building. Some went home once a week, some once a month, and others randomly.

When I arrived, only students of grades One and Two were at the Center. They ended the class earlier than others.

These youngest kids were in one bedroom that featured several lines of desks and stools and twenty-six screaming kids, filling every corner of the room. A young man was shouting at them to be quiet. He ordered them to take out their exercise books and finish their homework. I was told to help supervise.

Half an hour later, the manager came in and told me that my students had arrived. I was in charge of four kids from Grade Two and three kids from Grade Five. The manager sent me their homework lists through WeChat.

I stepped out of the bedroom and was almost scared to see heretofore empty sitting room and the other bedroom now filled with kids. They sat at dilapidated round tables, folded tables, tea tables, and desks, which had obviously been purchased from a flea market nearby. I squeezed from one bedroom to the other through the sitting room. It took me a while to find my students.

At about seven o'clock, a cook asked my students and me to have supper.

Everyone got their meal from the kitchen. Three stainless steel basins contained different fried vegetables on a worktop. The cook asked me to get a clean stainless bowl, fill it with rice, and take some dishes from the basins as I liked. Then I went to the sitting room. The students and teachers had supper there, so it was quite crowded. Everyone held their bowl and chopsticks and were careful not to bump others with their elbows. I waited for a bit and then found a stool.

Suddenly, a kid sitting beside me touched me and said, "You see the big cake there?"

He was not my student. I looked around and saw a beautiful cake box on the shelf.

The kid was nervous, but also happy, maybe because I was a stranger? But it also seemed that he didn't get along with other students well and maybe he thought I was kind. He hesitated and said, "That's my birthday cake."

A lot of ideas hit me: This kid wore pajamas so he lived in dorm on the sixth floor. Even on his birthday, his parents only ordered a birthday cake. Maybe he also went home randomly.

I was used to keeping a poker face, but I showed a big smile to him and said, "Happy Birthday!" trying to make my voice sweet and warm.

He smiled and said, "I'll share my cake with everybody later!"


"It's very nice of you."

It was almost nine o'clock when I finished my work. Most kids had been taken home by family. The sitting room was quiet. I had to leave for the last bus to my dorm. When I stepped out of the door, the kid who had chatted at supper time asked the manager, "Ms. Huang, may I light the candle and share my cake?"

I heard the middle-aged woman, who was busy talking to another teacher, say coldly and impatiently, "Later!"

## "YES, GRANNY"

---

he said, "I remember. When you were born, your dad phoned his apartment from the hospital. She would come to the downtown apartment, and stay there, taking care of your mom when she was pregnant. But the moment she learned that you were a girl, she packed her bags and returned to the countryside, without so much as looking at you and without telling us she was leaving. That woman just asked your dad to inform us that she had gone."

I nodded, "Yeah, Granny, I've heard this story more than one hundred times."

This old lady, packing my luggage and talking, was my maternal grandmother. When she says "the woman" or "that woman," she refers to my paternal grandmother. There have been endless battles between these two old women.

Granny continued, "I prefer girls. They are so much better than boys. You are the best. She left your dad's apartment and returned to the countryside to care for your uncle's wife. She was also pregnant and gave birth to a boy two months after your mother. That woman spared no effort to love and care for your cousin."

"Yes, Granny." I said, having heard the whole story so many times that I knew every small detail. To end this tiresome lecture, I said, "Then every time I needed to be cared for and you called her, she came but stayed only a few days. Meanwhile she looked for excuses to leave or she just refused to come. I only have one Granny - you."

Granny's broad smile showed that she was more than content with my answer. "Your paternal grandfather's funeral will be on Sunday?"

"Yes, Granny," I said.

My paternal grandfather had just died. This would be my first time to visit my distant ancestral village. I would go with my parents to attend the funeral.

She finished packing my piles of exercise books. I would stay a week for the complex traditional funeral in the countryside. The college entrance exam was coming in a month.

Granny pondered and then said, "Your paternal grandfather was a good man, unlike that woman."

"I have to go to bed, Granny," I said, knowing if I did not interrupt, she would begin another series of stories about her battles with that woman and Mom's being undervalued by the woman.

"OK, go to bed. Good night."

When I returned from the countryside, I went directly to Granny's apartment.

She was in the kitchen, preparing a feast, "You must have eaten very bad food there. They have nothing good to eat. You see this beef and fish? Your favorites. I'm cooking them for you."

"Yes, Granny."

"What about that woman?"

"She looked very bad. Too thin. Like a skeleton. She stayed in bed. It seemed she was dying."

"Did you talk to her?"

"No, Granny. She didn't understand my Chinese and I didn't understand her dialect."

Granny nodded, "Did you meet your cousin?"

"Yes, Granny."

"What did he do?"

"He was busy with cellphone games and reading online."

"What did you do there?"

"I had piles of exercise books, Granny."

"He didn't study?"

"No, Granny."

"Did he look after that woman?"

"No, Granny."

"Even once?"

"He was too...busy, I guess."

Granny checked the soup in the pressure cooker. A good odor emerged. She asked me to sip a little.

"You want more salt?"

"More salt, Granny."

"OK," Granny said and added a spoon of salt to the soup and stirred, "Who looked after the woman?"

"Nobody. Everyone was busy with the funeral."

"Why didn't you go look after her?"

"We couldn't understand each other, and she didn't want me to near her."

"Why do you say that? "

"The first time I met her, she looked very pitiful. I tried to hold her hand to comfort her silently but she pushed my hand away."


"Hmmm...The fish in the steamer is done. Put it on the table."

"Yes, Granny."



陈倩  
Chen Qian  
Rita

---

 'm Chen Qian, and my English name is Rita. Before I went to college, I lived in Ankang for eighteen years. It is a beautiful city in the south of Shaanxi. The climate is great because there is little air pollution. Welcome to my hometown!

My family consists of my father, mother, brother and me. I like my family because each member helps me with my study and daily life. They are my most important persons. I would like to do something for them when I have more money in the future.

In the past four years, I studied at Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University. In my free time, I participated in voluntary activities, which benefited me a lot. During summer vacations, I worked as a part-time teacher to help students with their English, which taught me how to better adapt to this society. Translation is now my major in XJTU. I want to learn practical skills and lay a firm foundation for job-hunting.



I like traveling. During short-term trips, I learn more about how to communicate with others and broaden my horizons. I earn money by doing some part-time work, instead of burdening my parents.

Through two years of hard work, I plan to be a professional translator within five years. Working in a state-owned company may be a great challenge. However, I'll try to improve myself, so I can get the job I want.

## A WOUNDED LAMB

---

**M**any were not spared from struggle meetings in the 1950s and 1960s. The quietness of the village was broken by large slogan boards.

Wang Renyi was accused of participating in certain political activities before Liberation. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, he cultivated crops and continued being an honest person. However, when the Cultural Revolution began, he was the first target. Society was now socialist.

Grandfather told me that one gloomy winter morning, leaves fell from the trees as initially, people loudly chanted, "Destroy the counter-revolutionary, Wang Renyi!"

After a while, Wang Renyi was brought onto the stage with his hands tied. The struggle session was very simple. As usual, there was an interrogation (name), charges (opposing the people, counter-revolutionary), and incrimination (anti-socialism, enemies of the people). How could a man who farmed every day have connections with such things? It was only the need of the situation that had him in trouble. He was a true victim. In fact, the village needed entertainment, but this was self-inflicted, cruel entertainment.

Wang Renyi did not resist, he was like a wounded lamb. The wind was cold, and he shivered as he heard those slogans. It was a mixture of fear, compassion, and despair which he had never experienced before. People continued chanting loudly, "Destroy the counter-revolutionary, Wang Renyi!"

The sun was rising above the horizon, time to work. The leader announced that the struggle meeting would now end here and continue the next day. Wang Renyi was unfettered. The scene was chaotic.

The crowd dissolved. The struggle meeting area was empty. The dry leaves that had been defeated were scattered everywhere. Winter was coming.


That night, Wang Renyi hung himself, unable to endure endless humiliation and torture.

When I was a young man and saw people forced to accept struggle or jailed, I thought they were guilty. But later I

realized that such "crimes" might have never existed. Wang Renyi was just one victim of society at that time. Nobody wants to return to those old days of struggle.

## LESSONS BEYOND TEXTBOOKS

---

 n a Friday afternoon in 2008, my head teacher, Mrs. Wang, suggested that we go out and enjoy nature's beauty since spring had come. We students were quite excited and decided to climb a nearby mountain.

The next morning, we gathered at the school gate, took a school bus, and reached the foot of the mountain around two hours later. Mrs. Wang divided us into two lines, and we started walking toward mountain top. At the beginning, we were all full of energy, but half an hour later, the mountain path had become very steep, which made us apprehensive. When I reached the middle of the mountain, I was panting and sweating and realized mountain climbing was exhausting.

After a while, several students and I said, "We want to give up. We are completely exhausted."

Mrs. Wang then said strictly, "If you don't want to continue, go back by yourself."

We looked at the path behind and wondered if we should follow the teacher and other classmates. To be honest, we dared not go back alone.


Mrs. Wang said, "You surrendered so quickly. Is your physical strength even less than mine? Be persistent. Let's compete to see who can reach the top mountain first!"

Her words boosted our morale, so we decided to continue. Mrs. Wang expressed her appreciation, because we had changed our mind, instead of giving up halfway. She went on to say life is similar to mountain climbing. Despite many setbacks, we gain success if we persist.

When we reached mountain top and looked at the other side of the mountain, which was not so steep. Maybe that's like life. When we encounter setbacks, we must face them bravely. This lesson is not in textbooks.

## JOURNEYS FINISHED AND UNFINISHED

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 On 28 October, 2015, Grandfather passed away. I went home by train soon after I got this shocking news. On the way, I could not control my feelings. I wept without speaking. My brain was empty. I was at a loss. Such an unexpected tragedy had never happened to me before.

Once I got home, I immediately burst into tears when I saw Grandfather's portrait. Father and other relatives all were busy with the funeral, and paid little attention to me. When everything came to an end, Father had a private talk with me, as he noticed I was still sad and had eaten a little for several days.

"Grandfather's death is a great blow to all of us, but we can't change it. You should cheer up and go back to school soon," Father said.

I said, "I didn't get to see him before he died, and I will always regret this. It is really hard for me to accept the reality of his death."

"Death is a law of nature. Nobody is immune. Since we can't change it, we must accept it and try to live better lives. This is what your grandfather would have expected."

"He gave a lot of love to me and Brother. He took care of us like a mother and cultivated us like a father. But I will never have an opportunity to express my gratitude." I wailed.

Father hugged me and said, "Cheer up! He was very proud of you. You never let us down. It is enough."

I still miss him. His death made me realize it is important to treasure the time that I can spend with my family members. Grandfather has started a journey in another world, and we, the living, should continue our present, unfinished journey.



程凯迪  
Cheng Kaidi  
Kate

---

I'm Cheng Kaidi, from Sichuan, where the national treasure, pandas, live. My hometown, Zigong, is located in the south of Sichuan, which is famous for its lantern shows, dinosaurs, and well salt. It is neither a big city, nor bustling. Different from those who lead fast-paced life in crowded cities, Zigong people enjoy an easy and comfortable life. Given the stagnant economy in my hometown, many young people flow into Chengdu, Guangzhou, and Hangzhou, leaving children and elders behind.

I am part of a nuclear family. Mom is a teacher in a kindergarten in Zigong, while Dad works in a medical corporation in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan. We have little time for reunion, because we respectively live in three different cities. Voice calls via WeChat are our main communication. Due to this, we cherish every second we spend together.

I have been in Zigong for eighteen years. I enrolled in Southwest Jiaotong University situated in Chengdu, where I spent four years. I got a BA degree in the University in

Translation and Interpretation. In September 2018, I came to Xi'an Jiaotong University for further education.

I have many hobbies, including reading novels, singing, yoga, playing, badminton, and travelling. I am fond of reading novels of different types, and indulged in fantastic and enchanting stories.

## UNIFORMED GIRL

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uniformed girl stands at a middle school gate. It is time for the school to be over. Swarms of students flow through the narrow gate. Noisy. Chaotic. She pinches a pure-white envelope tightly and hides it inside her sleeve. She leans sideways to avoid the crowd and watches the faces like radar. Nervousness, concern, and expectation arise in her mind.

"Even if there are so many heads, it's easy to identify him!" she murmurs.

Her eyes are tired. Few students now pass by. The anticipated one has not appeared.

She looks at her phone and checks the last message he sent her once again. It reads, "See you at the school gate when classes are over."

"Maybe he has not finished his classes," she thinks, taking out the envelope and gently touching it.

Passersby come and go, and give her puzzled looks. She lowers her head and stares at her black shoes, decorated with short, lovely fringe. They are very fashionable this year. She borrowed them from her good friend, Xiao Jing, last night, at the cost of one week of snacks.

The doorkeeper asks, "Are you waiting for someone? If you don't mind, please come in. I must lock the gate now."

Hearing this, she raises her head and slowly shakes it.


She sees the descending sun about to lose its glory. Street lamps begin coming on. The wind carries a chill and sweeps her gray face. The white envelope in her hand is slightly moist.

"Maybe the shoes don't suit me," she thinks, "It's a mistake to come here. So foolish! After playing such a trick on me, he is hiding somewhere and laughing at me!"



## CRUEL REALITY

---

y uncle relocated their home to a hillside. We then had to walk a long distance to visit him when the New Year came.

In 2006, we visited as usual. When we stepped into the house, a strange girl was standing in the living room. Dressed in a gray cotton-padded jacket, she constantly twisted her fingers. Uncle smiled and introduced her, "This is Yuemei, a new member of our family. From now on, she will live with us."

Uncle avoided explaining why she had come here and we also didn't ask it. As the adults prepared lunch, I approached her out of curiosity. I smiled and greeted, "Hi. Glad to meet you."

"Hi," she answered in a low voice, not looking at me.

"Do you like toys? I brought some. Which ones do you prefer?" I asked, trying to arouse her interest. She hesitated.

I continued, "How about this rabbit? Isn't it lovely?"

She took a quick look and slowly nodded. I gave her the rabbit toy, and she stared at it for a long time. When I became a bit impatient, she suddenly looked at me and grinned. Then, we played all day.


Later, we met just several times a year, and, our relationship grew closer and closer.

I never imagined that one day when uncle would send her to a welfare house. I wept and asked my parents. They told me that Yuemei was entrusted to Uncle by her parents, who were his friends. Her parents divorced and neither was willing to care for her, as they hurried to find jobs in other cities. They promised one of them would return to take her within five years. But the cruel reality was that they didn't return and Uncle had to bring up his own son. With not much money and time to take care of another child for another decade, Uncle sadly sent her to the welfare house.

I never saw her again.

## SALT WELLS

---

randmother told me that during the Ming Dynasty, many salt wells were located in the place that developed into my hometown. Plenty of businessmen gathered here and gradually the place became Rong Town.

Liu Fuming owned a small bookstore located in Gong, which was near Rong Town. His business was poor. After discussing with his wife, Liu decided to seek another job in Rong, which would cost a lot, even though Rong was near. To ensure that Liu would not suffer a lot from lack of money, his wife pawned her dowry and gave the money to him. Liu then left Gong.

Two months passed. He hadn't found a satisfactory job and he has little money left. One night with an empty belly, he sat in front of a nice restaurant, pondering if he should return home. A beggar staggered towards him. He had a dirty face and his hair dripped water. He seemed to be injured and frequently stumbled. Liu walked to the beggar, supported him with his arms, and asked, "Are you OK?"

The beggar faintly answered, "Food..."

Liu found that he had a fever. By this time, he had become unconscious, so Liu took him to a doctor, who refused to receive him, because Liu was unable to pay for treatment. Determined to save him, Liu said, "Can I stay and work for you?"

The doctor reluctantly agreed.

The next morning, the beggar revived, recalled what had happened, and asked the doctor for details. He felt grateful to Liu.

The beggar, Wang Ping, had discovered a salt well in Rong. At that time, owning a salt well meant great wealth and a respected status. Needless to say, this discovery brought him many benefits. Various people wanted to be his friends. He was delighted and didn't refuse anyone who flattered him. Some vicious people who were jealous of Wang, plotted and threw him in a river that was far from his home. Luckily, Wang did not drown. He struggled to the bank. After walking for a

long time, he was hungry but nobody would help him, until he met Liu.

Wang then invited Liu to work for him as a steward. Liu's wife was also invited to join him.



傅明明  
Fu Mingming  
Asher

---

**M**y name is Fu Mingming. Asher is my English name. I was born in Zhejiang Province in the southeast of China. I have a five-member family and I am the youngest. People always say I have Father's nose and Mother's eyes. I think I am more like my mother in personality and attitude toward things. When I was a little boy, my family moved to Yiwu and settled. Yiwu is a small but crowded city because of its famous commercial markets. It is also a primary tourist destination for foreign businessmen.


I graduated from China Jiliang University where I made many friends and enjoyed my academic achievement. I spent much of my first college year on volunteering as an interpreter and guide in the China Tea Museum situated by the West Lake, and the Zhejiang Silk Museum. I encountered many people from China and abroad, and acquired a lot of knowledge through experience. Now I am an MTI student in XJTU.

I'm optimistic, hardworking, and responsible. I try my best to do my work well. I pressure myself, which makes me

anxious sometimes. I enjoy reading fiction, especially sci-fi. My favorites are *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin, *Stories of Your Life and Others* by Ted Chiang, and Yu Hua's *To Live*, *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant*. I also like surfing the Internet to broaden my horizon and keep informed of the news.

## THE TEMPLE

---

y hometown is the Honglin Mountain, a small village populated with tens of families in southeastern Zhejiang. There is no well in the village, but the Qinghe River flows by, bringing joy, food, and life to the villagers. A well-known temple stands at the upper stream of the Qinghe River, which attracts believers at various ages every day from the villages and even from distant towns.

Mom once told me that when she was ten, her elder sister, my *ergu*, was very sick with a high fever and was barely conscious for days. Mom was young then, and was left at home to look after her sister. She dashed across the twisted path to the upper stream of the river, respectfully draw water from a well behind the temple yard. Then she carefully returned home along the same path and poured the fresh spring water into a clay jar as well as the herbs that Grandpa had gathered that morning when they were still coated with dew. Mom lit wood with a match, and gradually smelly steams fled through a tiny hole in the jar cover, like a dancing tiny river made up of cloud roaring to Heaven. At that moment, the cat that the sisters kept meowed for mom's attention but didn't marched forward in fear of the disgusting smell of herbs in the air, unless Mom held it in her arms. With burning woods painting their faces a vague yellow and gray ashes falling on their hair and fur, they waited together and then Mom spooned the brewed medicine into a porcelain bowl.

Two days later, Ergu was not better. Grandma suggested by Ergu's bed after dinner, "Tomorrow I'll head to the temple, light a yellow candle and three incense sticks and beg for mercy from Pusa."


The next day, Grandma returned home and told Grandpa to have Ergu's bed moved to the temple. That morning, Grandma happened to meet the temple master, and begged for a cure for her poor daughter. The master said, Ergu should quit eating meat, fish, or herbs, and water from the Qinghe River and silent meditation were all she really needed. That noon when Ergu reached the backyard of the temple, she was definitely happy and confident, Mom recalled. And Mom was

happy and confident too, but was unexpectedly overwhelmed by news of Aunt's sudden death after three days.

Ergu's funeral was simple but comprehensive. The monks invited from the temple chanted for half a day, seemingly attempting to enchant people not to blame them. Today, that splendid, solemn temple still stands by the upper stream, with its refurbished crimson tiles, repainted walls, and never-ending smokes of candles and incense sticks mutely wafting into the sky by the Qinghe River.

## FOOLISH XING

---

oolish Xing was a fellow-villager from the Hongling Mountains whose mental retardation added to his fame. I learned the name "Xing" from my peers, but I never called him that. Children called him "Foolish Xing" with innocent cruelty to show we were different and smart. Actually, all of us seldom or rarely talked to him.

I first met Foolish Xing at noon when I returned home with my mother and a group of relatives. I was joyful and excited. The Hongling Mountains were a paradise of pleasure where I played with my cousins. That noon, dazzling sunlight seared my exposed skin, attempting to bronze me like Grandfather. I glanced and noticed a silent boy sitting on the threshold of my grandparents' abode house who was staring at the front yard where hens were foraging. I guessed was a cousin.

"Here is Foolish Xing again!" my eldest cousin, Qiao, said.

"Who's Foolish Xing?" I asked without thinking, the burning sun draining my energy and interest.

"A fool. He can only make some loud sounds. He smirks at everything -- stones, trees, and even livestock!"

At that moment, the chickens scattered into directions as Foolish Xing chased them.

"What is he doing now?"

"Who knows the mind of a fool?" Cousin said jokingly.

"He comes here only for Grandma's candy! She cares about him," Cousin Ting said.

Foolish Xing was soon out of our sight before and we flooded into the house, seeking shelter from the sun. Though I had no idea about his real name, his parents, or his home, I knew that he was the only retarded in the village. Later, I encountered him at my grandparents' home, wearing a clumsy smile every time.

Six years earlier, the Hongling Mountains suffered a horrible storm that ruined many houses. News came that Foolish Xing had been found dead in Yunan, a fishing village nearly nine kilometers away from the Hongling Mountains.



"Foolish Xing was lost during the typhoon and died," Mother mentioned at dinner one night.


"Foolish Xing? I remember him," replied Father.

"He was found dead in Yunan Village, which was really far from his home," added Mother.

I listened silently, wondering if he smiled or cried during the storm. I didn't know and I forced myself not to think about it. Later, the Hongling Mountains seemed quieter.

## PUMPKIN MEALS

---

 cannot recall the date of this pumpkin meal, because such meals were frequent in my childhood. When I recall my home in the Honglin Mountain, pumpkin meals are the first thing that come to my mind. A pumpkin meal for my mother's generation was a feast enjoyed by all her siblings. Only pumpkin was served for the family. This cheap, nutritious food provided enough energy for one day of hard work. For me and my four cousins, a pumpkin meal was also a feast prepared with omelets, noodles, pies, and pork ribs.

Almost every summer vacation, a group of cousins, sisters, and brothers headed to the Honglin Mountain where my paternal grandparents' adobe house stood. It took over one hour for us to "conquer" the particular mountain where we headed. Of course, it would have been faster if we had focused on walking, but our curiosity and energy led us to make other choices. We ambled among the bushes attempting to catch grasshoppers and dragonflies and periodically set out on adventures in the woods for the pheasants and eggs in the wild.

When we eventually reached our destination, we were welcomed with a pumpkin meal by my grandparents. We held a big porcelain bowl with pumpkin chunks cut into small blocks attached to little seeds. I liked chewing the pumpkin seeds most. I would take a sip of the soup along with some seeds, use my tongue to lick the juice around the seeds, and then slice the seed coat with my incisor teeth to enjoy the seed it protected from me. I'd then stir the soup and it became sweeter, messier, and golden and my every swallow was of pleasure and enjoyment. Grandpa sometimes sat on the threshold with an even bigger bowl and devoured the pumpkin meal quickly and then silently accompanied us, smoking his home-grown tobacco in a pipe. Just as the ethereal smoke scattered, good old days like that vanished.



孔欢  
Kong Huan  
Ulrica

---


**M**y name is Kong Huan. I have the same surname as Confucius, so I firmly believe that I am a descendant of Confucius since childhood. I am from Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, where blue sky, fresh air, and dairy products of high quality are abundant. People in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region are said to be forthright, friendly, and outgoing and so do I.

I graduated from Tianjin Medical University, majoring in medical English. Last year, I was recommended for admission to Xi'an Jiaotong University. Now I am a graduate student majoring in English interpretation.

My hobbies are swimming, painting, writing Chinese calligraphy and playing the ukulele. I am good at both brush-pen and hard-pen calligraphy for which I earned some awards. I am not very good at the others but I keep practicing. Life sometimes is boring and gloomy so these hobbies bring me joy and light.

## WOUNDED, REUNITED HEARTS

---

randmother was born in 1949. Born in a remote village in Hunan Province, she has seen her father once in her life. Her father married and then joined the Kuomintang through his uncle's relationship. Shortly after her father left, her mother found herself pregnant and asked someone to write a letter telling her father the news. Her father replied that when the child was born, he would apply for permission to come back to visit.

In 1949, the Kuomintang failed in China's civil war. Therefore, my grandmother's father, as a Kuomintang officer, followed the Kuomintang to Taiwan. He wrote to the family and said that when he settled in Taiwan, he would bring them. Full of hope, Grandmother's mother waited for three years alone. Finally, Grandmother's mother chose to remarry because she was unable to make a living while her husband sent no news from Taiwan. Grandmother was then raised by her own grandmother.

Many years passed. Grandmother's father finally managed to get Grandmother's address. He wanted to fulfill his long-cherished wish to meet the daughter he had never met. He came to the mainland to visit with his two sons and wife, who is one year younger than my grandmother.

The second they saw each other, father and daughter burst into tears. Although they had never seen each other, the familiar accent and consanguinity closely link them. According to Grandmother, "Papa" a word she had never said had great power and made her feel warm, at ease, and dependent. Neighbors and relatives were moved to tears when they saw the father and daughter meet. However, Grandmother's stepmother and her half-brothers were jealous. Maybe they worried that Grandmother's father would give Grandmother much money and love.

Her father brought Grandmother jade bracelets, gold necklaces, gold rings, dollars, and many other precious gifts. Maybe these gifts were an effort to make up for the absence of thirty-eight years. Grandmother prepared the best meal she could at her home. The family enjoyed the meal and chatted

happily. This scene was something Grandmother never dared imagine.

"Today's meal is so delicious, I want to have another bowl of rice," said her father.

"Let me put some rice from the cooker into your bowl, Papa," said Grandmother happily, taking her father's bowl and heading for the rice cooker.

At this moment, her stepmother suddenly stood grabbed the bowl violently from Grandmother and evilly declared, "Can't allow her to put rice into your bowl. Maybe she'll poison you!"

Everyone was stunned and the atmosphere became depressed and tense.

Grandmother cried and ran out. Her father chased her and shouted,

"Wait for me!" Grandmother stopped.

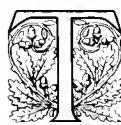
"Why did you abandon me and my mother and marry someone else?" Grandmother cried.

"I waited eight years. During that eight years, every moment I looked forward to reuniting with you and your mother. Finally, I gave up. When I first arrived in Taiwan, your stepmother's family took care of me. I had no support in Taiwan, so finally I had no choice but to marry again. Cui'e, I am sorry," he confessed.

"This is the first and maybe the last time we meet. It's enough to have a chance to call you 'Papa'. Papa, I don't blame you, I blame fate," said Grandmother.

## REFLECTION: A QINGHAI HAN SHEHUO

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he paper *Delighting the Gods in 1990: A Han Shehuo in Qinghai Province (PRC)* attracts me. The celebratory activity during Spring Festival - *shehuo* - which I have never experienced, showcases enchanting performances and mysterious customs. In addition, I have thought about the difficulties in the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture. There may be three main reasons for the decline of Chinese traditional culture.

Firstly, the impact of foreign culture restricts the development of Chinese traditional culture. Under the background of globalization, the collision and exchange between Chinese and Western cultures promote the pattern of cross-cultural development. For example, young people in China are more interested in celebrating foreign festivals, such as Christmas, Halloween, Valentine's day and so on. My friends and I feel that the Spring Festival has less and less festive atmosphere, while in some western festivals, China's streets and alleys are decorated, and people are crazy about following the way of celebrating abroad.

Secondly, it is because some traditional Chinese culture cannot keep pace with the modern civilization. As reported in the paper, married women unable to conceive may kowtow to the dragon performing in *shehuo*, because in the past uneducated people placed their hopes for a better life on traditional culture and customs and the traditional culture and customs could teach people moral lesions in an old-fashioned way. However, nowadays, with the development of science and the popularization of education, well-educated Chinese, especially young people, think that many traditional Chinese customs are superstitious, so these people sneer at them, not to mention to inherit them.

Thirdly, in today's society, people are generally led by personal interests, therefore, the traditional culture that cannot get economic returns in a short time is gradually forgotten. Taking Peking Opera which is the quintessence of Chinese culture as an example, few young people are willing to learn it because most people prefer spending their money

on other kinds of entertainments while the older Peking opera artists are getting fewer and fewer. Many other traditional cultures, customs and crafts are endangering with few people to inherit.

In conclusion, if we do not take action to inherit and carry forward Chinese traditional culture, we will only experience them in books and videos in the future.

## TO BE HAPPIER

---

**B**efore reading this passage, I have never thought that deeply about happiness, therefore, the passage gives me many inspirations on how to be happier in the future. Pursuing happiness seems to be the ultimate goal of many people, however, we try very hard but seem to make little difference. With the inspirations given by the passage, I have come up with three tips to become happier.

Firstly, know ourselves. When a person wants too much or his ability is not enough to get what he wants, he will get into annoyance, pressure and anxiety. In fact, the things a person desires may not be necessary for him. Sometimes it is unnecessary desire that deprives you of your happiness. For example, supposing that I am an ordinary uneducated peasant but I extremely desire a luxurious villa, I will be unhappy and depressed because even though I spare no efforts to make money I am unlikely to afford a luxurious villa. However, if I know myself well, I will think that a villa may be unnecessary for me thus it cannot influence my happiness. Making clear that who you are and what are the reasonable desires may avoid unnecessary unhappiness and annoyance.

Secondly, face obstacles with equanimity. An old Chinese saying goes, "You just focus on doing what you can and leave the rest up to God." It doesn't mean that we can wait for the happiness coming by itself. It indicates that after trying our best to do something, we don't need to care much about the result, which cannot be changed by us. This attitude is necessary for gaining happiness because there are countless obstacles in our life, if our feelings are influenced by every obstacle, the sense of happiness is bound to decrease. We should keep in mind that never be bothered by the unchangeable things.

Thirdly, consider happiness as a surprise. If a person is happy all the time, he will not cherish happiness and even won't care about it. The reason why happiness is precious is that it is hard to get. Don't hold the view that a person can have permanently happiness and just treat it as a surprise. Thinking that the other feelings are normal to you, while the



sense of happy is a surprising gift, we may be happier than before.

In conclusion, make some changes from now on and we may become happier.



梁一鸿  
Liang Yihong  
Frances

---

**M**y name is Liang Yihong, and my English name is Frances. I was born in an ordinary family in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. I have lived in Xi'an since I was a child. I have a serious father and a diligent mother, who both love me very much. In 2013, I was admitted to Xi'an Jiaotong University and after five years of study, I was awarded a bachelor's degree of clinical medicine. The undergraduate education gave me an extensive knowledge of medicine and cultivated my ability of logical thinking. In the learning process, apart from my major, I also developed an interest in English, so I studied hard and became a graduate student majoring in translation at Xi'an Jiaotong University. I am very grateful to have an opportunity to get further education in English.

I am a hardworking, serious student. I like learning new knowledge and using it in the future. I am also generous and easy-going. I get along well with people around me. In terms of hobbies, I prefer to stay alone, watching movies and listening to music. I like digital painting. Whenever I feel tired or depressed, I pick up a pen and draw my favorite figure, then my negative feelings disappear.

## BOOM! BOOM!

---



According to legend, temple fairs in China originated in ancient times when people offered sacrifices to village deities. This gradually evolved into marketplaces for people to exchange products and it was also a place for cultural performances. When I was little, I'd never been to a temple fair. I was impressed when my parents took me to a temple fair for the first time when I was in junior high school.

On the morning of the first day of the Lunar New Year, we got up early and set out. At the temple fair entrance, we found a lot of people. Bright red lanterns hung all over the place, adding to the atmosphere. Merchants had come and were selling ornaments, antiques, souvenirs, and so on. Food vendors were the largest number of sellers offering various delicious snacks with local characteristics were everywhere. However, what attracted me most was a craftsman making clay figurines. Through his ingenious skills, lifelike clay figurines were born one by one.

The focus of the temple fair was the Lion Dance, a traditional art form that is performed by two people wearing a lion costume. Hearing the sound of drums and gongs, we approached the stage. From a long distance, we saw two majestic lions chasing a colored ball. They jumped up and down from time to time on the table that was at the center of the stage. The lions sometimes retreated, and then sometimes leaped forward and somersaulted in order to battle the lion dancer. Whenever they made a difficult movement, the audience warmly applauded. The lions were nimble and gave vivid expressions. They sometimes blinked at the audience in a cute and delightful way.

This wonderful performance was soon over. The audience left slowly, while still discussing the performance. Suddenly, in the crowd, I saw a familiar figure in front of the stage. It was my classmate, Zhang Li, who was dressed in a costume that signaled he had just taken part in the performance.

Curiously, I approached and greeted, "Hello, Zhang Li! Nice to meet you!"

Zhang Li said in surprise, "Oh, nice to meet you, too!"

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

He wiped sweat from his face and replied, "I played the drum for the performance," and pointed to a big nearby drum.

"Amazing! I didn't know you played the drum!" I said in surprise.

He smiled and said, "I have loved this traditional art since I was a child. I used to play the drum for the honor guard in my hometown."


"That's great!" I exclaimed. "Do you know our school has a Lion Dance team?"

His eyes lit up. "Of course! I want to join them one day and carry forward our traditional culture!" he said confidently.

We chatted for a while until Mother came and asked me to go home. I said goodbye, and left with my parents. On the way home, I thought about what had happened at the temple fair. This visit brought me a novel experience, but also taught me more about Chinese traditional culture. From the conversation with Zhang Li, I began to better understand the importance of young people passing on Chinese traditional culture.

## DEAD ENDS AND BROKEN AIRPLANES

---

eng Xi and Bai Ting were good friends in the fourth grade of Mingde Primary School. During a break, Zeng Xi turned to Bai Ting, who was sitting behind her, and said, "Have you heard? They found an abandoned bomb shelter nearby. Let's go there after class!"

Feeling confused, Bai Ting said, "A bomb shelter? I've never seen one before. What is fun there?"

Zeng Xi said excitedly, "Some of our classmates explored the bomb shelter. It's dark, mysterious, and there are some scary things there! Come on! It'll be fun!"

Bai Ting shook her head again and again, and said, "Sounds dangerous!"

"Don't worry. Some of our classmates went there and returned safely. Besides, I brought this," Zeng Xi comforted and pulled a flashlight out of her bag.

When Bai Ting saw the torch, she was a bit relieved, but still hesitant.

"Well, if you go with me, I'll give you the book you want most on your birthday. How about that?" Zeng Xi said.

This was an offer Bai Ting found hard to refuse and after a few seconds, she murmured, "Okay, I'll go with you."

After class, they quickly left school and hurried to their destination. When they stood in front of the bomb shelter entrance, Bai Ting said uneasily, "I feel bad that we didn't tell our parents."

Zeng Xi said disapprovingly, "It won't take long. We'll be up and out soon! I'll go down first. You follow me," and then, she climbed down the ladder at the entrance of the hole.

"Wait!" Bai Ting called and climbed down after her.

They went to the bottom, where the sunlight was very weak. Zeng Xi turned on the flashlight. "Let's go," she said and took Bai Ting's hand.

They walked deep into the bomb shelter. The range of the flashlight was limited so they could only see a small area in front of them. The two girls walked silently for a while. Suddenly a scream shattered the silence, as Bai Ting grabbed

Zeng Xi's arm and said in a trembling voice, "I... I think I just stepped on a soft thing. What is it?"

Zeng Xi pulled Bai Ting behind her, and used the flashlight to light the floor. A squashed dead mouse lay on the floor. Zeng Xi sighed in relief, and said, "It's just a mouse, nothing horrible."

"Let's go now!" Bai Ting said hastily, not wanting to look at the mouse.

A few more minutes passed and they came to a spacious area. "Look, it's a room!" Zeng Xi said excitedly.

"Indeed!" Bai Ting responded.

A bed frame leaned against a wall. A bicycle was propped against the opposite wall. Both the bed frame and the bicycle looked like they hadn't been used for decades. Zeng Xi asked, "Do you think these were left by those living here in the past?"

Her friend thought for a moment and answered, "Maybe. I'm wondering what kind of life they lived?"

"It must have been very hard. Think about how bad it is to live underground. They had to worry about bombs as well," Zeng Xi said confidently.

"Fortunately, we don't have to hide here," Bai Ting said, pulled Zeng Xi's arm, and said "Xiao Xi, I want to go!"

Zeng Xi readily agreed, "All right. There's nothing more to see anyway."

The way back was longer than they expected. "Are you sure this is the right way?" Bai Ting ventured nervously.

"It should be. Am I mistaken?" Zeng Xi said, beginning to doubt herself. After a while, they came to a dead end.

"There's no way out!" Bai Ting shrieked.

"Don't panic! I'm sure we'll find the way," Zeng Xi said, but her voice was less confident than before.

The two girls walked for a while, but still didn't find where they had come in.

"Xiao Xi, I'm tired of walking. I don't think we can get out," Bai Ting said and began sobbing. "I regret not telling my parents about this, otherwise they would come for us."

Zeng Xi hugged her friend. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have asked you to come with me," Zeng Xi apologized.

"I don't blame you. It was my decision to come," Bai Ting sobbed.

Zeng Xi now felt tired, too. The two friends sat down together.

"Do you think anyone else will come here?" Zeng Xi asked.

"I don't know. We didn't tell anyone that we would come here," Bai Ting said in despair. After a while, she added, "If we can't get out, I want to leave my toys and pocket money to my brother. I hope that my cat can get good care."

Zeng Xi felt touched and said, "I regret quarreling with my mother this morning. I often make her angry. I now realize how much I miss her. If we can get out, I'll not upset her again."

After a while, as if she had made up her mind, Bai Ting said, "Xiao Xi, I want to tell you something."

"What?" Zeng Xi said.

Bai Ting said carefully, "I broke your model plane. It was an accident. But I was afraid you would be angry, so I dared not tell you. You liked it so much."

"It was you?" Zeng Xi said in disbelief.

Bai Ting was on the verge of crying as she said, "Will you forgive me?"

Zeng Xi patted her on the shoulder, and said, "I forgot that a long time ago."

Bai Ting then embraced her friend gratefully.

Zeng Xi suddenly said, "Do you remember that dead end?"

"Yes, we just passed it again," Bai Ting answered.

Zeng Xi said, "I just thought of a classmate who told me about this bomb shelter. He said that there was an exit near a dead end. When we got to the dead end, we didn't search for other branches."

Bai Ting's spirit lifted, "So what are we waiting for? Let's get moving!" she said.

Zeng Xi smiled and took her hand. The two girls stood up and continued to look for a way out again and managed to find the exit.

Bathed in sunlight again, Zeng Xi and Bai Ting smiled comfortably. "It sure feels good to stand in bright sunshine!" Zeng Xi exclaimed.

Bai Ting nudged her friend with her elbow, and asked, "Will you do something like this again?"

"Never!" Zeng Xi answered firmly.

"Never." Bai Ting repeated. Then, they looked at each other and burst into peals of tinkling laughter.


### **\*Postscript**

This story is from my personal experience. What happened in the bomb shelter was real, but I made changes. The model plane incident came from another personal experience.



## SILENCE OR VOICE?

---

 trembled when the monitor called my name. I thought that the teacher would be here this afternoon but unfortunately, he did not come. There was a roar of laughter as I walked to the podium with heavy steps.

"What's wrong with her? She really wants to run for the arts committee?" someone whispered.

"Ha! Look at her hair. So messy!" someone said loudly, not caring that I would hear.

More students began whispering.

"Everybody stop talking! Now, start your speech," said the monitor impatiently.

I tugged at the corner of my coat uneasily. I didn't know where to look, so stared at the chalk box on the podium. I began, "Hello, everyone. I want to run for the arts committee because I like art very much. I..."

A voice interrupted, "Who are you talking to, the podium?"

More laughter.

Another student said, "Do you think your appearance can represent our class?"

I flushed, lowered my head, and said, "I don't think my appearance has anything to do....."

Before I could finish, another student said loudly, "I think you should stop speaking. If you have time, you should first get rid of that smell that follows you!" Laughter grew louder.

My face grew redder and tears rolled round my eyes. A heavy stone laid in my heart. I could barely breathe. I regretted my decision, and wished the ground would open and swallow me. I looked at the monitor, who was looking at her watch as if what was happening had nothing to do with her.

A boy stood, and said, "We should show some respect! I don't think her appearance matters."

The laughter stopped at once. A powerfully built boy raised his eyebrows and said, "What's your problem? You're not into her, are you? By the way, I saw you talking to her the other day."

A whistle came from one of the students, and then someone shouted, "If you were with her, you'd get that smell too!" The group burst into laughter again.

The boy looked embarrassed, opened his mouth, but said nothing. His deskmate pulled his sleeve and asked, "You're joking, aren't you?"

The boy noticed a keen gaze coming from the podium. He turned his head away and said, "That's ..."



林倩  
Lin Qian  
Change

---

**M**y name is Lin Qian, and my English name is Change. I'm twenty-three years old, born in a small village at the foot of Hanshan Mountain, Qingshu Town, Nanzheng District, Hanzhong City, Shaanxi Province. Today, only my parents live there as my sister and I are both studying in universities.

My family consists of my father, mother, little sister, and me. Father has been a driver for many years. He is an honest man with few words. Mother is the most beautiful woman in the world, and she has skills of a superwoman. No matter how hard life is, she is always positive and brave. Sister is two years younger than me. Both of us study in Xi'an now. We eat together every weekend. Because of the one-child policy, most of my classmates don't have siblings, so they admire me very much.

I graduated from Peking University in 2018, and got a bachelor degree in Nursing as well as a minor in International Politics. Now I am a postgraduate of English written translation. Life here is simple and full.


My hobbies include tea, jogging, movies, pen-and-ink calligraphy, and guitar. Mother has run a tea business for more than ten years, so I like tea and drink it every day. I

watch a classic movie every week, busy or not, from which I can learn a lot. Guitar practice gives me peace and tenderness. My favorite fruit is durian and I want to be like it, hard outside and soft inside, with a special smell that appeals to sincere followers.

I worked as an intern at the World Wildlife Fund for one month in 2017, in Beijing. I'm interested in environmental protection and I liked the work environment and atmosphere there - relaxing and cheerful. I hope to find a job in an international organization and engage in global environment or healthcare in the future.

## A DROWNING

---

eiwei was my aunt and uncle's only child. As his name suggested, he was expected to be a great man, but they lost him six years ago.

Uncle is my maternal grandparents' eldest son. Honest and introverted, he married a mean woman. While they were working in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, Weiwei was left at home with our grandparents. Once the local school merged with the town's school, our grandparents brought him to town where he lived with us for six years in primary school and two years in junior high school in my home. Our relationship was closer than cousins.

I admired and sympathized with him. Mom bought me clothes and supplies. Pocket money only covered my breakfast. I had to save money for a long time to buy a birthday gift for my best friend. In contrast, Weiwei's parents gave him lot of money by his parents. They also bought the latest electronic gadgets for him, including a MP3 player, MP4 player, and smart phone. However, these things failed to make him happy. Every Friday after school Weiwei returned to the village by himself where my aunt and uncle spent a lot on building their own house. When Weiwei graduated from primary school their house was completed. I dared not sleep alone, and would have never stayed alone in such a big house. When I asked him if he felt afraid to stay by himself in that house, he replied that everything was fine.

I entered senior high school and then I lived on campus. I returned home every two weeks. The time I spent with Weiwei grew less and less.

He drowned in the most beautiful river winding through our town during the 2012 summer vacation. One hot afternoon while I was watching TV at home, he swam with two classmates secretly. My maternal grandmother rushed in and told me someone had called my uncle. Weiwei had vanished in the river. It never occurred to me that Weiwei would die.

Half an hour later Father returned home. Weiwei's body had been recovered. I couldn't believe it until I saw his body. All the house lights were on that night. Nobody slept. Aunt


and Uncle returned home the next day and I was sent to school. My family members and teachers thought the college entrance examination was critical for me and that I should avoid Weiwei's death.

Weiwei was fourteen and died from drowning. According to social conventions, he was given no funeral and no tombstone. I first visited his grave during Spring Festival. I promised to put up a tombstone for him.

Weiwei's two classmates each gave Aunt and Uncle 10,000 yuan. They are still working in Taiyuan. I learned to swim in college. Mom first got angry, thinking I should stay as far away as I could from water. I insisted on protecting myself and also to save other people. I hope fewer parents experience the pain of losing a child.

## TERMINALLY ILL CHILDREN

---

 saw and experienced the cruelest deaths last year, when I was an intern at Children's Hospital Capital Institute of Pediatrics, one of the two best pediatric hospitals in Beijing.

Death is inevitable, but a little child's death is especially sad.

I first worked in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Patients were mainly newborns born prematurely or with a congenital disease. The babies lay in incubators, lived on ventilators, and received treatment every day. Every morning, after a shift change, I took the babies to bathe, and weighed and diapered them. I measured their vital signs and started treatment, including injections, transfusions, and medications. I was very happy when babies improved and left the NICU, but I worried about their future quality of life. There were also some babies who came and then left this world.

A father gave up treating his little baby, who had a congenital heart disease, visceral prolapse, and metabolic disorders. They had little money and it was impossible to cure him. The father was heart-broken. His wife had experienced a postpartum hemorrhage and was also hospitalized. He shouldered all these burdens alone. He told her that their baby was fine, because he first thought their baby could survive. It was hard for him to face this problem alone. I withdrew the ventilator tube, and other life lines of the baby, as instructed by my supervisor. The father was told to take the baby to see his mother for the first and last time. Whenever I think about this, my eyes turn red, and I feel I was a murderer when I removed the ventilator. It's difficult to let this feeling go.

Then I rotated to the Department of Hematology, where patients were mainly children with various types of leukemia. Some recovered, and some were destined to not recover. We were asked to promise nothing to the patients or their parents. Nobody was capable of fulfilling such promises. The children's smiles were brighter than normal children, but also pathetic, especial children with malignant tumors. It was during my


internship that one of my high school classmates died of leukemia. She was an excellent student and had been admitted to Tsinghua University.

Medicine is very developed. Is this true? If it is, why are there many unclear mechanisms in medical books, and so many diseases remain incurable? As medical workers, we can do nothing about death. This is why I quit working in hospitals. Death is too heavy for me.



## TWELVE AND WISE

---

 I have been a part-time online English tutor for two years. It's a good job that pays 120 yuan per hour. I do it several hours a week and earn enough to cover my monthly living expenses. Of course, the students pay more to the agency than that to me. Not all students can afford it. For example, the first student assigned to me was a twelve-year-old girl from a single parent family in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province.

In our first class, I shared my own story and learning experiences. She was interested and listened carefully. We interacted actively. At the end of the class we talked like old friends, though I am eight years older than her.

"Does this class help you?" I asked.

"Yeah, of course," she replied.

"But you look unhappy and worried. What happened? Did I say something..."

"No, you're doing fine. I like you. But I will not be in your class, or anyone's class."

"Would you like to tell me why? Your mom told me that you like English but you can't keep up with other students in your class."

When I mentioned her mother, her eyes turned red. "The tutorial fee is high. Mom has to earn more money. I don't want her to work hard. Since I entered junior high school, we haven't had breakfast together and she always returns home late. I worry about her. I just want her to spend more time with me, like before."

I was shocked by this perspective of a twelve-year-old. I assured her that her English was excellent and said, "When you adapt to the new environment in junior high school, everything will be fine. Don't worry. I'll talk to your mother," I promised.

I texted to her mother who was very busy. She made an appointment to talk about the details after work. At 11:30 pm my phone rang.

"Hello. Is that Miss Lin? I'm sorry to bother you so late, but I just finished work."

"It doesn't matter. You push yourself so hard..."

"I have no choice. My husband abandoned us. My daughter is such a good girl. I want to provide her better conditions."

"You're a great mother."

"Thank you. Could you tell me more details about the class?"

"Of course. The class was very successful. Your daughter is lovely. I like her. She performed well. I don't think there is anything wrong with her study. Everything will be fine when she adapts to the new school. Don't worry. Is she staying at home alone now?"

"Yes. I'm on my way. Thank you. She likes you. She told me so on the phone."

"She must have been waiting for you for a long time. She said she wants you to spend more time with her. What she wants is not beautiful clothes, shoes, nor nice food, but you."

"She never told me that."


"Actually, she doesn't need extra classes now."

"All right, I understand, but all her classmates are having extra classes. I'm afraid she will fail the exams. Thank you, Miss Lin. I'll call you tomorrow."

She didn't call me and there was no response to my text messages. I failed to fulfill my promise to that wise twelve-year-old girl.

## WAITING A LIFETIME

---

f Dengdeng were alive, he would study at the university in the same city where his parents had worked. It was his childhood dream.

Dengdeng was an only child. His two elder sisters were given to others at birth. They were lucky, because a fortune-teller had divined misfortune. Dengdeng's mother had gone through several miscarriages. When Dengdeng finally arrived, the whole family was relieved, as if a great mission had been fulfilled.

Dengdeng lived in a village. Adults went out to work in distant big cities and returned only during the Spring Festival. Dengdeng's parents could only do physical labor. Dengdeng was left at home and brought up by his grandparents.

When Dengdeng was eleven-year-old, the primary school in his village merged with the school in town. It was too far away to return home every day, so he lived in his aunt's home. He got used to walking home by himself and never thought anything was wrong till he saw children in town picked up by their parents.

Every Friday a teacher asked all the students to record their weekend and picked several students to read their accounts aloud. Dengdeng was shocked to hear that his classmates spent a happy weekend with their parents playing in a park or taking short trips. It seemed that they celebrated the Spring Festival every weekend.

Dengdeng missed his parents and the summer after primary school he had saved enough money to visit them. They were unhappy, because the train ticket was expensive. Dengdeng was told to study hard to enter the university in their city.

Dengdeng changed. He refused to play with other children and spent all his spare time studying. He never failed an exam during his last six years. Eventually the university he dreamed of admitted him. When his parents received the admission notice, they cried over the phone and Dengdeng also burst into tears. They promised to return a week later to

hold a Teacher Appreciation Banquet. The whole family was as happy as the day he was born.

This was the first time Dengdeng's parents had returned home other than during the Spring Festival. Dengdeng got up early, wanting to surprise his parents at the railway station. However, when he saw them at the station exit, he crossed the road excitedly without watching. He was struck by a car and died.



卢宏艺  
Lu Hongyi  
Louise

---

**M**y name is Lu Hongyi and my English name is Louise. I was born and grew up in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. I didn't leave Guangxi until I graduated from high school. If I had, I might be more inclusive and adaptable. My parents are open-minded and my opinions are valued in family affairs, which shapes my personality as independent and confident, in some way.

I attended Chengdu University of Information and Technology, Sichuan Province after graduating from high school. I chose to pursue advanced studies and came to Xi'an for my master degree in Xi'an Jiaotong University.


During my study of translation and interpretation, I realize that my personality may not be suitable for a full-time translator or interpreter. I am a sociable person and prefer jobs that entail cooperating with others and focus on overall situations. After I get my MA, I plan to apply for management, operation or marketing jobs. The road ahead is rough but I will make a wholehearted effort.

Recently I have read Michelle Obama's autobiography, *Becoming*, and I came to realize that being emulous, as well as diffident, in fact, is not contradictory. I am both emulous and diffident. I believe in my capability, while at the same time, because of my perfectionism, I am so afraid of messing up that

I would give myself too much pressure and doubt I might not be qualified. I will seek strength from my inner self. Writing is really an effective way to talk with as well as comprehend myself. Therefore, I will not stop.

## ONE DAY OF AN

---

n got up at seven AM and began to dress up. She had bought an expensive business suit for today's interview. She had waited a long time for this appointment. At eight o'clock, An was trying to push her way onto the metro, while keeping an eye on men who might have evil intentions. After an hour-long difficult journey, she reached the company's office.

"This is my resume. My understanding of this position is ..."

"Excuse me Miss, are you married?"

An froze for a moment and hesitated, "No. I applied for this job to....."

"Do you have a boyfriend?" the interviewer interjected.

"Yes. Is this related to my possible employment?" An asked, a little annoyed.

"Do you plan to marry in the next few years? What about having children?" the interviewer moved on, ignoring An's question.

"The answers are both no," An answered impatiently.

The interviewer didn't respond, looked at An's resume for several seconds, and said, "Thank you for coming today. We will contact you after we make a decision."

An left, upset and a bit angry at not being respected and valued. She returned home, took off the uncomfortable suit, called her boyfriend and described what had happened.

"You must have prepared a bad resume. That's why the interviewer wasn't interested," he said.

"No! It's a good resume!" An countered.

"Enterprises prefer male employees. You will expect a maternity leave and will pay attention to your children."

Not knowing how to respond, An hung up angrily.

That evening, An went to her parents' home for dinner. Her parents were very concerned and asked how the interview had gone.

"Not good," An murmured.

"Don't worry. Try a few more. Luck will eventually come," her mother comforted.

"I say you should continue your study," her father said, "Get a MA degree. It will be easier for you to find a nice husband and a good job."

An remained silent.

"Your father is right. Women need a steady family life, especially when you have children. At that time, a career will not be yours. You don't need to worry about your job much."

That night, An lay in bed and thought about the day's conversations. She wondered, "Is it my problem, or is something wrong with society?"



## REMEMBERING FEIFEI

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sharp ring woke me Wednesday morning. I picked up the phone. It was Mom. I had a bad feeling. She seldom called in the early morning on weekdays.

"Hello..."

"I just received a phone call from the doctor in the pet hospital. Feifei is gone..."

"Why?"

I don't remember what she said then, I only remembered I kept asking why and I tried to keep my voice steady. I hung up quickly and lay on the bed silently for a while. I didn't cry.

Two weeks earlier, I had loudly and proudly announced to my new classmates that I had a dog and he had been with me for eleven years. Now, everything had changed. It was not strange considering his age and I was mentally prepared for his death. Still, I was devastated when it suddenly happened on 10th September 2018.

Grandmother had taken him for a walk and then returned to her home. At that time, a rottweiler passed and Feifei barked at him, or maybe the rottweiler barked first. Anyhow, Feifei was seriously mauled. Rottweilers are fierce and Feifei was a little domestic pet. Feifei was sent to a pet hospital and was there for a week. I was informed a week later on the day he came home. I saw him lying weakly in a cage. He had never been in a cage before. The hair on the lower part of his body had been shaved. There was a long, horrible suture on his abdomen. I felt a sharp pain in my heart and my breath stopped for a second. The wound on his abdomen had not recovered completely. His hind legs were unable to move because he had lost feeling in his lower body. Dad said the rottweiler's owner was a drug abuser and refused to be responsible. I was outraged. Why should my dog have to suffer for nothing? At that time, I did not expect things to worsen.

I hurried to end the video call because I was on the verge of bursting into tears. I did not want my parents to see me crying. I called my boyfriend and couldn't stop crying. My feeling was a mix of sadness, guilt, and anger. I struggled. Should I go home during Mid-Autumn Festival or National

Day? What upset me most was that although my dog was seriously injured, I hesitated because of the cost of the airplane ticket. "Am I heartless or optimistic?" I asked myself. In the end I didn't go home.

A week later, Dad called and said Feifei was very ill. He hadn't eaten and couldn't easily urinate or defecate. His legs still had no feeling, and he had a fever. He might die, and my parents were considering euthanasia so that he would no longer suffer. Dad asked me if I wanted to see him one last time. I was still struggling. I was afraid I would break down if I saw him and it became very real that he was going to die. But what if he wanted to see me? Would I regret not seeing him? Finally, I decided to go home, but he didn't wait for me.

Now I avoid thinking about this. I only told two friends about what happened and I refused to be informed of follow-ups by my parents or receive comfort. The moments we had will suddenly come to me and then I realize I will never be able to do such things with him again. It hurts. I feel guilty for not taking better care of him and for trying to not be so grieved over his death. This guilty feeling distresses me. I think I will never be fine. A part of me has changed. I was reluctant to write this, but then I decided to record this to not forget it.

## SHIMMERING IMAGININGS

---

**E**arlier, I abruptly wake up.

He and I were driving a car that was not so old. We were caught in a traffic jam at an intersection, just after emerging from a viaduct. It was still daylight. The roads brimmed with vehicles.

He wore a brown jacket with white short sleeves. He did not have the youthful face I was familiar with. He was bearded. We had finished shopping. Bulging shopping bags perched on the back seat. The whole scene resembled an American film from the last century, maybe a love story set in the rural Midwest.

I might have to find a way out by myself. Anyhow, I left him and joined some other people. It was getting dark. I walked along a path with these people. Scattered and separated, the line was long. I knew this path was near the main road.

Under dim street lamps and the grey shadow of trees, one side of the path was a row of closed shops. I wore a brown skirt and a grey sweater. I went through a barrier with others, and I walked confidently at the head of the line. The others hesitantly followed me. I didn't know why I walked in front. Perhaps that is what I usually did.

I walked up to a woman. We chatted intimately, but I didn't trust these people. My panic grew. I wanted to go back. I wanted to go back to him. I pretended to have a pain in my stomach and complained all the way back. When I walked past these people, they stared at me suspiciously. I stopped and waited at the roadside. Almost all of them stopped too and stared at me. I bellowed. "Don't follow me! Stop staring at me!"

At that moment I looked ahead, through those people. A crowd all dressed differently, old and young, expressionless, lifeless, nonchalant, orderly, were walking toward us. The pace was not too fast nor too slow, not too light nor too heavy. They blocked the path. Without hesitation, I turned and ran. Several people followed me while some stayed unresponsive.

It was hard to run. It seemed that I couldn't use much of my strength. My legs trembled and I couldn't take a step. I struggled, but not hard enough, as if my mind was held down by my body. As I turned a corner, I beheld the edge of a dark blue sky blooming into orange by the street lamps. A broad road was filled with unmoving people, who crowded the whole road shoulder to shoulder with blank, lifeless looks.

These beings swarmed down the main road and branches, to a distant, nearly invisible intersection. I knew he was there, unable to move. I scrambled over the shoulders of these beings with great effort, pushing against their heads, as they remained unmoving, the orange glow of the street lamps shimmering before me.

If I was overwhelmed by the crowd, I knew I would also become one of their members, losing my will, thoughts, memories, and become a part of their collective. I thought, "When I die, I should be with him." As I moved more and more slowly, the crowd behind me came closer and closer. I looked at the distant light spot where he was. I knew I would not get there. My brain instantaneously provided an image of me standing in the crowd alone. Sharp desolation and desperation pierced my mind and soul.



任晓蕾  
Ren Xiaolei  
Shirley

---

**M**y name is Shirley. I come from Wenxian County, Henan Province, the cradle of Tai Chi. In my childhood, I lived with my maternal grandparents in a small village. It was a memorable experience that children living in metropolis lack. My parents are both teachers in the county-level senior high school. I studied in Dalian University of Technology for four years, majoring in Business English. I like traveling and enjoy writing traveling guides on social media. Traveling is a good way to know other cultures and see beautiful scenes.

## A WHITE KNIGHT

---

**H**an Meimei was excited to start a new life and meet new classmates at the best middle school in a small county. She didn't worry about her study at all because her mother had urged her to preview all the courses during the summer vacation. Her mother taught Chinese at a primary school and her father was a chemistry teacher at a senior high school. They strictly supervised her study.

On her way to school, Han Meimei met a boy dressed in white who hurriedly passed her. He impressed her on the first day of school as the tallest in the class. His name was Li Lei. At first, Han Meimei didn't have the courage to make friends with him because he seemed to be quite mature while she thought of herself as still a pupil. After school, Han Meimei walked home with her confidantes, while Li Lei accompanied several energetic boys from their class. From that day on, the two groups encountered each other in an alley and gradually merged into one group. They accompanied each other until they reached the end of that alley every day, chatting and joking.

One day, when Han Meimei got home, the dishes were a mess on the dining table. She had no idea what had happened. Her mother was in tears. She had never seen her mother cry so sadly. Han Meimei was stunned when her good-tempered dad smashed plates in a fit of rage. Similar quarrels were then frequent. She couldn't tell who was to blame.

Every day she studied hard, hurried home, and confided in no one. She was not interested in the latest soap opera popular within her small group. The only thing that concerned her was the never-ending battles at home. Everything seemed unreal. In the past, Han Meimei had been the only girl who proudly described the harmony in her family when others complained that their parents often quarreled. The sudden conflict between her parents destroyed their marriage and love for each other. On the mid-term examination, she ranked first, which was the first time she had met her parents' expectation, but she received no praise from them.

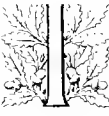
In the following days, her parents were busy with divorce proceedings. Sometimes, she had to ask for leave from her teacher to attend court hearings. With her mother, she moved to a new home far from the school and then she biked home on another street. One day, to her surprise, she noticed Li Lei walking behind her. She never imagined he would appear on this street.

"Why don't you walk with our friends?" he asked.

"I moved to a new home," Han Meimei answered.

She didn't want to mention the changes in her family, thinking no one would understand her sadness. She guessed she must be the first student in her class whose parents had divorced. Li Lei then walked her home, explaining that his home was in the same direction as hers. When Han Meimei reached her home, it was almost half past twelve. It was so hot at noon that the boy's T-shirt was saturated with sweat. From that day on, Li Lei was the only one who accompanied her on this street twice a day for a month. Gradually, Han Meimei's depression lifted and she willingly communicated with others.

The summer vacation was coming, and she hung out with a friend who suggested they visit Li Lei. They eventually located the community where Li Lei lived. It was located in the opposite direction of Han Meimei's home.

It was the last year of my study in the primary school where Mother taught Chinese. We visited my maternal grandfather in hospital on the weekend, since my maternal grandmother was busy with farm work in the village. On Monday afternoon, Mother took me to school by bike as usual. Without a noon nap I felt a little bit sleepy. When Mother locked her bike in the shade, I shuffled towards the huge three-storied building. There were more than thirty classrooms in this old building. It usually took me three minutes running from my classroom on the third floor to the only public lavatory on the playground during breaks. Sometimes, I felt the building vibrating when naughty boys jumped in the classroom.

I thought, "Teacher Chen, my head teacher, will surely be angry at me for my unfinished homework. This afternoon, I'm going to have two math classes and one Chinese class."

Originally, a music class had been scheduled, but Teacher Chen had told us earlier it was to be replaced by a Chinese class.

When I climbed to the second floor, I heard a noise from the classroom. After a few seconds, a huge gaggle of students rushed downstairs in panic. I could hardly keep my feet on the narrow staircase and followed them. Someone fell in the stampede and screamed. Pushed by the crowd, I managed to get out of the staircase.

The headmaster shouted through the loud-speaker, "All students gather orderly in the playground!"

Once the students sat in a line, a girl told me that ceiling lamps and desks had shook. Nobody could predict what would happen next. We looked at the sky, filled with thick clouds like broken tofu.

A boy murmured, "This kind of cloud only occurs before a vicious earthquake."

Without electricity, telephones, and the Internet, I worried about Grandfather on a drip and Grandmother in a shabby house.



## "BLACK BOY"

**D**o you want a little brother?" Mom asked when I was three years old.

"Sure, if he can play with me," I answered.

Several months later, Brother was born.

"It's a secret. Don't tell others you have a brother. If anyone asks about your brother, just tell them he is your cousin," Mom often reminded me.

At first, I did believe that he was Uncle's son, but then I realized this was a lie.

One day, Dad took me with him to the senior high school where he worked. He told me to stay in his office when he had class.

"Your dad told me you have a little brother," his colleague said after Dad left.

"No," I replied immediately. Mom had taught me how to answer this question, but telling a lie made me blush with shame.

"Your dad must have taught you to answer like this. I am your dad's best friend. You don't have to lie," he said, taking a piece of candy from the pocket and putting it in my hand.

I hesitated because I know children shouldn't lie, and he was Dad's friend, but I dared not disobey Mom.

After getting home, I told my parents what had happened. They praised me and then I was sent to my grandparents' home.

After that, I frequently heard about "family planning". My grandparents explained that my brother was a "black boy" and "family planning" was a group of bad people who took "black boys" away. They didn't allow me and my brother to go outside. Every time they said "family planning" was searching for "black boys" door to door, I hid in an abandoned vat with Brother. When they entered the room we were in, we silently held our breath.

"How many children are there in your family?" a man asked.

"Only me and my wife. My daughter works in town," Grandfather answered.

"Your neighbor said your daughter has two children. Where are they?" another man asked as others searched the room and backyard.

"My daughter has one child in accordance with the policies. They live in town," Grandfather said.


After a while, they left. Grandmother stood at the door keeping watch in case they came back. Grandfather then pulled us out of the vat.

Mom said that "black boys" couldn't be added to our household register. If the government found there were two children in my family, Mom or Dad would lose their job. Brother lived at my grandparents' home until the policy relaxed. When Brother applied to register for primary school, my parents were fined 10,000 *yuan* when they applied to register him.

When Brother got registered, he said, "I'm no longer a 'black boy'."

## AN UNWELCOME BOY

---

hou Han was unwelcome. Every time the head teacher arranged our seating, no one wanted to sit by him. I didn't like others' discrimination because he was crippled, so I suggested sharing a desk with him.

The cicadas' prolonged shrill was irritating. The classroom was thick with heat and sweat. I suffered most. Everyone took a table cover home to wash except Zhou Han. Mine was deep-sky-blue. His was almost yellow, covered with blood stains and scratches of ball-point pens. His desk and drawer were dirty, with disordered, dog-eared books.

During the lecture, his elbow occupied two thirds of the desk, so I could hardly write.

"Could you pull in your elbow?" I whispered.

"What? I didn't hear you clearly," he said loudly, drawing our classmates' glances.

Suddenly, two streams of blood flowed from his nostrils from which a few nasal hairs protruded. He covered his nose with one hand immediately. I reported to the teacher that Zhou Han's nose was bleeding and handed a pack of tissues to him. He hobbled to the washroom, blood dripping all the way.

During the break, he returned from the washroom with tissues stuffed in his nostrils. His sloppy T-shirt was also blood-stained. The smell of sweat and blood made me uncomfortable.

The monitor handed out exam papers from the previous week. Zhou Han snatched a bunch of papers, rummaged for his paper, and wrinkled the whole bunch.

"Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!" he cried loudly, beating his head hard.

"How stupid I am!" he sputtered, standing beside my desk. His face was twisted and spit flew from his mouth, striking on my face and hair.

I wiped my face silently and tried to comfort him. In fact, he had got 99 points, the highest in the class. Then, I started to revise errors on my paper. Suddenly, he took my paper to figure out if my score was higher than his and returned it crumpled.

I couldn't figure out a question even after thinking about it for ten minutes.

"Excuse me. I really don't understand this question," I said.

"Don't ask me. I don't know. I don't study well," he said rapidly, spattering saliva as usual.

I understood why no one wanted to sit by him.



王琦  
Wang Qi  
Lucy

---

**I** graduated from Hainan University, majoring in English literature. In the fifth semester at university, I was an exchange student and studied in Taiwan with a major in applied English. I passed all the exams and obtained a certificate of international tour guide there.

In my spare time, I prefer to travel, watch TV series, and exercise. Each vacation, I visit a new place with friends or family. I have been to Changsha, Kaili, Wuxi, Shanghai, and Taipei. I like to talk with local people, take photos of picturesque spots, and taste delicious food. I am also a US TV fan, and I am attracted by the plots sometimes. Usually I exercise four times a week by playing ping-pong or walking to relax.

I will complete postgraduate school in 2020, and I plan to obtain comprehensive knowledge of journalism in a foreign country to further my study. I plan to visit more foreign spots and record the wonder and beauty of nature, maybe with my boyfriend. I plan to write about each travel experience. Then I

want to be a bilingual reporter or a translator for editing and translating the news. Furthermore, I plan to experience being a volunteer teaching in Sri Lanka in the future. I hope I can purchase a car with my own money in five years.

## A LESSON IN PATRIOTISM

---

**B**eijing is more than 400 kilometers from my home Handan, Hebei Province. When I was a child, I was eager to visit Beijing. During my summer vacation while I was fifth grade in primary school, my parents decided to travel to Beijing. We took a crowded, noisy train and about five hours later, reached Beijing. I felt a little afraid because Beijing was strange and crowded, so I closely followed my parents. At night, we planned to watch the ritual of raising the national flag the next morning. When I went to bed, I was very excited.

In order to have a better view, we got up at 2:30AM, took the subway, and arrived at Tian'anmen Square. Although it was cold and dark before dawn, there were many people already waiting there. Some had slept on the square. It seemed that some didn't even sleep. Many parents had brought their children to give them a lesson in patriotism. I felt sleepy and impatient. Father told me that when he had been a soldier in Beijing, he often couldn't sleep at night because he had to stand guard and maintain order. Inspired by his words, I calmed down.

At 5:15AM, the national flag guards appeared. They held the flag and proudly marched in step. All was silent and then the national anthem was played. Father saluted the national flag, standing erect. We began to sing the national anthem and watched the flag until it reached the top of the flagpole. After the ritual, I saw tears in Father's eyes. Maybe he had been reminded of his days in the army. Maybe he recalled the miserable life of old China.

Many people were leaving. I grabbed a hand. To my surprise, it was not Mother. I turned back and couldn't find Father. I cried desperately and walked to a policeman, who comforted me and lent me a cell phone. I dialed Mother's number and waited until my parents found me. The policeman gave me some candy and stayed with me. My parents thanked him sincerely.

I gained a deeper understanding of patriotism, however, when I am in a crowded place, I am still feeling a bit nervous.

## A PRETTY HAT

---

**M**y home was near my primary school. When I was eight years old, I walked to school alone. On the way one day, I encountered an old woman sitting on a stone before her small home in a narrow, quiet valley. She sat, smiling. She was kind to kids, giving us candy and chatting with us. She was seventy or so, with a ponytail and white hair. She was thin and haggard, and wore a black coat.

Once when I was walking, a fierce dog came barking into the middle of the road. I felt frightened and stopped, tears in my eyes, not knowing what to do. The old woman came, and drove the dog away with a stick. She said patiently, "Next time, if you meet a dog, throw a stone at it. Be brave!" I thanked her and left.

She sat on the stone in front of her house with a pretty hat in her hand, regardless of the weather. She stared at the corner of the street. Some said she didn't return home and sleep until midnight. She sang lullabies at night. Many elders told us not to talk to her or eat anything she gave us, because she had psychiatric problems.

Twenty years earlier, she had divorced her husband. Their child was put into a black car and they never returned. She gazed at the corner, expecting the child's return. Gradually, she mistook other kids as her children. That's also why she was kind and warm to children and gave us candy.

Five years later, she passed away from cancer. She was found by the community. When I walked in that dark, peaceful valley at night, it seemed that faint songs hovered around and I saw her weak, solitary figure still in front of her house. The pretty hat was on the stone, telling us she never left.



## SAILING THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

---

**D**octors raced against the clock to save his life. He had been brought to the hospital by ambulance, gripping an Ironman toy. Deep in his consciousness, he knew it was his son's birthday. In his dream, he recalled the time when they were together and he sat beside Xiao Le.

The birth of his son had opened a new chapter in his life. When he held the infant, he understood the responsibility of being a father and a man.

"How fortunate I am to have you as my wife and have a lovely son! Thank Heavens. This is the best time in my life!" he said to his wife.

"I wish him great health and happiness."

"I promise I will give him the best education and living environment."

He had been working overtime to fulfill his promise of creating a family not only for his wife, but also for his son's future. Because of the hustle and bustle of daily life, he rarely had days-off and he was focused on making money and being promoted. He often came home late at night and then kissed Xiao Le's forehead quietly. He took time to listen to his wife who told him what had happened that day. He felt happy about his progress and was inspired by his own diligence. At Xiao Le's ten-year-old birthday party, he gave him a teddy bear.

"Whenever you feel lonely, this teddy bear will accompany you, just like me."

November first was Xiao Le's birthday. Xiao Le asked his mother, "Will Dad come back early tonight?"

"Sure. He won't break his promise. Let's wait patiently."

"I want to call Daddy," Xiao Le said and phoned. "*Du du du...*" was the only reply.

The father had bought an Ironman toy and could not wait to see his birthday boy. When he crossed the road, he didn't notice a vehicle speeding, violating the traffic regulations.

In his dream, he finally got home. His wife was napping on the couch, a smile on her face. Maybe she dreamed of chatting with him. As time went by, their love was not on the

decline. He wanted to give the best to her. He wanted her to care less about housework. At that moment, he was eager to kiss her for she took good care of him, respected parents and his loved Xiao Le.

Back to reality, he was still in a coma and on a life-support machine, but this didn't stop his mind from sailing through time and distance, propelled by love's unstoppable power.



吴娜  
Wu Na  
Una

---

**M**y name is Wu Na and my English name is Una, which sounds the same as my Chinese name. I was born in Zhengzhou, one of the fast-developing cities in mid-China, located in Henan Province; I have lived there for twenty-four years. I love reading novels, watching movies and TV series, and I also like singing. I like reading novels the most. I can spend an entire day reading without doing anything except eating and going to the toilet. I also like traveling. Reading can move out soul and travel moves our body. Reading enriches my inner world and traveling expands my horizon.

## HAIRY CHILD

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**H**airy Child was an orphan without a real name. No one knew why villagers called him Hairy Child. Actually, he was not hairy.

When his parents died, his uncle took him in. His uncle was poor and Hairy Child's aunt was stingy. Having another child to feed meant life became harder. His aunt disliked and ignored him. Underfed, he was thin and small.

The boy's only friend was a cow. At the age of twelve, Hairy Child loved spending time with his cow, which belonged to the landlord. Every day, he went out to herd the cow and talked to it about his uncle and his family, and village affairs. The cow sometimes mooed twice in response. He hoped to keep the cow for the rest of his life.

When the child was fifteen his fate changed as he was herding the cow on a summer day. His aunt came with his lunch and told him to eat it while it was hot. The boy shivered and thought, "Why does it feel cold on such a hot day?"

When she left the boy picked up the bowl and was about to eat, however, the cow came over, eager for the food. The boy laughed at the cow and said, "What are you doing? This is mine," but he gave it to the cow anyway. After the cow had eaten all the food, the boy thought, "Well, I have nothing to eat." The cow then fell to the ground, foaming at the mouth, and died. Hairy Child was terrified, understanding his aunt had tried to poison him.

He ran out of the village and kept running until it was dark. He didn't know where he was or where he was going. Tired and hungry, he stopped, lay on the ground and did not move.


The next morning Hairy Child was found by an infantry platoon. Learning his situation, the platoon invited him to join them and so he became a soldier. They also gave him a name - Wu Shengying.

After the war, he got a job as a prison guard and married my grandmother who was a dozen years younger. Yes, Hairy Child was my grandfather. Grandmother gave birth to four

boys and a girl. Father was the eldest. I never met Grandfather because he died in a traffic accident before I was born. All I know about him was from my aged grandmother, who was too old to remember the details very clearly.

## REFLECTION: *LIVING AND DYING AT THE FEET OF SNOWY MOUNTAIN*

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his book is not only the childhood of Mao Mao but also a common experience of most Chinese children in countryside. Some of the experiences are familiar to me and remind me of my life as a child.

When I read that Mao Mao's grandmother died on a rainy night of Mid-Autumn Festival, I thought of my own grandmother, who also passed away on a rainy night of Mid-Autumn Festival. Actually, it was in the early hours on the sixteenth day of the eighth lunar month. That was the last time that the whole family got together to celebrate the festival because my grandmother had gone. However, she was still alive in our memory. As Mao Mao felt when he was upset and wronged, I went to Grandmother's grave and told her my sadness. Sometimes it was not convenient to visit her grave so I would say it to the air and I believed that she can hear me. She was a very nice woman, kind, warmhearted, and generous. My parents were busy with their jobs and had no time to prepare lunch for me, therefore, I had lunch with my grandparents.

Although I was not a boy, my maternal grandparents gave me all things that they owned. One New Year's Eve, my mother and I went to my Grandparents' home, which was a tradition for us. At that time Grandmother suffered from Alzheimer's and did not remember all members in the family. There is a tradition in China that elders should give gift money to kids in the family, thus children will grow up healthily and happily. When my grandfather was talking to a big uncle, my grandmother asked him for money. All of us felt puzzled and had no idea what she was going to do. Then my grandfather gave her ten *yuan* and she handed it to me. Everybody was shocked and pleased to see her regaining the sense. However, she just recovered herself for one minute. At that moment, I realized how much she loved me. I am still moved when I think of the night at this very moment.


Nowadays, in China, boys are still preferred by countryside's families. In the opinion of the old, girls are

considered to leave home and belong to other families when they get married, while sons will stay at home and take care of the parents when they are old and ill. There are some traditional rules that show the unbalanced status in a big family. My friend told me that in his family, daughters-in-law were not allowed to sit around the table with their husband when there was a family meal. For most people, they will be more delighted if the baby is a boy though that boys and girls seem equal today. Another friend told me that she did not like to visit her grandparents for they paid little attention to her and other girls in the family while treated boys well. When I was an infant, my mother was busy working and my father worked in a neighboring town. Once my maternal grandmother was ill, she could not take care of me. My mother turned to my paternal grandmother to watch me for one day but she refused since she had to take care of my younger male cousin.

This book epitomizes China's countryside life, which includes a lot of traditions and customs, including patriarchal traditions. With the popularization of education, many corrupt customs will slowly fade out.

## TO THE DRIVING SCHOOL ONE WINTER MORNING

---

t was an extremely cold, overcast winter day. A hungry young lady was on her way to the driving school at seven AM. Few people were up and no shop opened before eight AM. Her village was remote, few taxis were available, and so she walked a long way to the bus station.

When she reached the station, she found no place to sit. After standing and waiting about twenty minutes, she saw a bus coming. It was the bus that ran to the driving school. However, it passed by and turned left at a crossroad. She was shocked and froze. No one could explain because the bus station was empty. With an empty stomach and a cold body, she decided to go to the next station where the bus might stop.

She walked in the cold wind, shivering from cold and hunger. She didn't know where the next station was. She felt awful and depressed. There was a long bridge there. No one walked on it and no taxi passed by.

"Why didn't I have breakfast? Why did I have to walk hungry and alone along an asphalt street like a vagrant?" she thought.

Suddenly, she burst into tears and thought, "The driving coach is bad tempered. He will shout at me if I am late. I'm hungry and cold. I just want to go back home and stay in a warm room. Why do I have driving practice in winter? It will snow and I didn't bring an umbrella with me. This is the most terrible day this year." She sobbed with abandon because no one could hear this and she was full of grievance. She walked and cried, still not finding the bus station.

A young man on an electric motorcycle passed. He noticed the young lady and stopped. She saw that young man and stopped crying. She walked to the man and asked him to give her a ride.

"What happened? Are you lost? You can't find your way home?" he asked.

"No, I am tired and hungry and I can't find the bus station. I'm going to the driving school," she answered.



"Where is the driving school? Maybe I can take you there," he said.

"It's in Mazhai Village. Do you know it?" she said.

"Of course, I am going there, too. Come on! Let's go!" he replied.

"Thank you," she said and got on the motorcycle and forgot to think about how trustworthy he was.

A few seconds later she noticed a bus station. She said nothing.

She was full of hope.



熊乐  
Xiong Le  
Katelyn

---

I'm Xiong Le, from Weinan City, Shaanxi Province. You may also call me Katelyn. Maybe you think my Chinese name means "happy panda", because "Xiong" in Chinese is "Panda", "Le" is "happy". I am grateful to my parents and lovely elder sister and younger brother. Grandma is over eighty, and likes to make friends. Her many friends suggest she is quite young.

I studied English language and literature at Xi'an International Studies University, and graduated in July 2018. I was then admitted to study translation in Xi'an Jiaotong University from September 2018 to July 2020. I am grateful in this opportunity. Two-year is a short time. What I learn will be a foundation of my future career. Strengthening my language ability is important for my future career.

I like reading and travelling, because it enriches my knowledge and experience. I like watching movies. Vivid stories make me ponder over time, appreciate beautiful scenery, and the clothes they feature. I plan to travel to various cities in China. I also want to visit Britain, France, and America. I should do more sports with my friends in my spare time, to benefit my health.

In the coming five years, I plan to improve my translation and interpreting abilities and graduate. Then I plan to try different jobs and find what is a good choice for me. I want to earn some money and to travel with families or friends.

## A HAPPY BUN

---



A little girl was walking to primary school. Few people were on the way on such a cold early morning. Everything was quiet.

She walked slowly, her hands in her pockets. "So cold," she thought.

Suddenly, "Stop!"

She was startled and turned.

Two boys were standing close behind her. They stared at her, holding a dirty, white bag.

"To school?"

"Yeah," the girl responded fearfully.

"We are schoolmates, you must know us," they said.

"Yes, what do you want?" she responded.

"We met your dad. He's over there. He wants you."

"Are you kidding?"

The girl's father worked in another city. Taking a step backward, she wondered what would happen next.

"Oh, all right," one said hesitantly.

Suddenly, the boys ran away, leaving the girl no time to react. Her brain was blank. She felt numb. She couldn't move, as if her feet were stuck in mud.

More people were on the road and the sun grew stronger.

"Is that girl lost? She looks puzzled," someone said.

"Are you okay?" another asked.

"I hope I'll be fine," she thought.

She realized that she should move, or she would be late for school. She turned slowly, not yet recovered from her confusion and fright. She moved forward a step, her hands in her pants' pockets. She was puzzled and frightened.

Seeing steamed buns, and delicious soup, she salivated. She took out money to buy breakfast. Putting her hands in her side pockets, she found nothing.

Depressed and confused, she would have no breakfast. She thought she would be hungry and maybe even faint in class. She felt helpless. Tears ran down her face. A bun seller saw her tears and came with a bun.

"What happened?" she asked.

"I don't know why, but I have no money for breakfast. I put money in my pocket. I don't know where it went."

"I'll give you a bun. You should be happy. Smile when you feel depressed!"

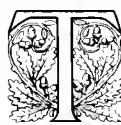
"Thank you."

The girl entered the primary school, holding the bun. The woman was right. She would smile when she encountered difficulties.

She smiled.


## REFLECTION: *THE END OF HOMO SAPIENS*

---

here are seven parts in this text. The first is the introduction. Sapiens cannot break through the biological limits, but at the beginning of the twenty-first century, homo sapiens has broken the laws of natural selection which are replaced by laws of intelligent design. The examples are proliferation of chickens and the creation of the fluorescent green rabbit, which are all products of intelligent design. Besides, it shows that the intelligent design can be realized through three ways. They are biological engineering, cyborg engineering, and the engineering of inorganic life. The second part introduces the biological engineering. It is a human intervention on the biological level. It aims to modify an organism's shape, capabilities, needs or desires so that some preconceived cultural idea can be realized. The third part shows geneticists aim to revive the extinct creatures, like mammoth and the Neanderthals. The genetic engineering and other forms of biological engineering might not be easy. It is not sure that bioengineering could really resurrect the Neanderthals, but it would be possible that homo sapiens would end, because tinkering with genes would not kill us, but might change the homo sapiens. The fourth part introduces the cyborg engineering, and it tells that sapiens are being turned into cyborgs. The examples are bionic ears and bionic arms. The fifth part is the engineering of inorganic being, e.g., computer programs and viruses. The sixth part is the possible new singularity in the future. The last part is the prophesy, and it implies that homo sapiens would be replaced by another extremely different beings.

A sentence leave me a deep impression: "In a sense, nearly all of us are bionic these days, since our natural senses and functions are supplemented by devices such as eyeglasses, pacemakers, orthotics, and even computers and mobile phones." I am surprised that we are so bionic. Technological development brings us convenience, but we generally have various inorganic features to modify our abilities, desires, personalities, and identities. I have thought that even if we create another life, we cannot be replaced, because we can

think. The entirely new digital mind is composed of computer code, but if it has a sense of self, consciousness and memory, that would be frightened for me. I have known Frankenstein before, it is a terrible but possible story, but it can be avoided. Besides, we are in a technological era. We can change a lot of things through science and technology. For example, improved medical technology can relieve patients' pain and make them feel hopeful about regaining health. We have created artificial intelligence, robots, and made breakthroughs in genetic area, which benefit all of us. However, these continuous breakthroughs would bring some disadvantages. For example, if we can invent the new beings who have thoughts, innovation, sensation, and emotion, that would be threatened for us. Frankenstein is an imagination about the future, but it makes us reflect, because if the new beings are stronger and out of control, we human beings would be dangerous.

 Chapter Nineteen of *A Brief History of Humankind* discussed happiness, including counting happiness and chemical happiness and the meaning of life and knowing ourselves.

In the introduction part, the author mentioned two sentences. "Nothing in the comfortable lives of the urban middle class can approach the wild excitement and sheer joy experienced by a forager band on a successful mammoth hunt. Every new invention just puts another mile between us and the Garden of Eden. Medieval peasants may indeed have been more miserable than their hunter-gatherer forebears." What he said indicated that revolution or progress might not bring happiness. We destroyed human's foundations of prosperity with endless consumption. Our happiness might be on the basis of the extinction or pains of other creatures. Therefore, this part made me think about the ecological issues. Our industries might not only bring us prosperity, but the decrease of species in the world. We had to think about how to make all of creatures happy, not only humans.

In the "Counting Happiness" real happiness should be the focus. The material factors were not the complete happiness for people. It was obvious that a lot of people living in prosperous cities were not happy, because they felt alienated and meaningless. So the author gave a generally accepted definition of happiness. That was subjective well-being. Namely, the happiness was something we felt inside ourselves. It was a sense of temporary or long-term contentment. Material factors could not thoroughly decide whether we were happy or not, but could deeply influence. For example, poverty, family, and community could make a difference. I thought the happiness was mainly decided by the gap between subjective expectations and objective reality. This point was in line with the author. Therefore, contentment reflects happiness to some degree.

In "Chemical Happiness", I was surprised that our happiness was governed by biochemical mechanisms. The complex system of nerves, neurons, synapses, and various



biochemical substances, such as serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin were dominant. I thought happiness was only connected with our feelings before. I now understand why some people have achieved a lot, but they were always not happy and were hard to feel happy. The factor would be biochemical mechanisms.

In "The Meaning of Life", the focus was the meaning of life or the value of one's life decided whether people were happy or not. I agreed with the author. If we felt ourselves needed for others or the society, we would be happier than ignored by others. However, I could not agree with the author on self-delusion. We should not delude ourselves that we were meaningful for others or society. That would widen the gap between subjective expectations and objective reality. Therefore, our happiness would disappear.

In "Know Yourself", the author mentioned Buddhism. I thought accepting ourselves was vital, but stopping pursuit was too negative. To avoid suffering, we should pursue satisfaction. External conditions might not be the key factor for happiness, but happiness should not be said to be independent of external conditions. We should pursue beautiful and worthwhile things but not pursue to excess nor pursue nothing.



徐思妍  
Xu Siyan  
Winnie

**M**y name is Xu Siyan and you may call me Winnie. I was born in Qianshan, Anhui Province. Qianshan is a small county located in southeast Anhui. It is famous for Huangmei Opera and Mount Tianzhu. Huangmei Opera is among the five major operas in China and was listed in the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2006. Mountain of Lord Wan is another name for Mount Tianzhu and "Wan" is the abbreviation for Anhui Province.

I'm the only child in my family. Father is a teacher and Mother runs a stationery store. When I was a child, Father taught me Chinese calligraphy, which greatly benefited me. I resemble Mother in appearance and Father in character. People easily see resemblance when seeing mother and me.

I have spent about four-fifths of my life in Anhui and the other time in Shaanxi. My undergraduate study in English was completed at Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University in Yangling, the only Agricultural Hi-tech Industries Demonstration Zone in China. Apart from study, I joined the

student union and worked in the department of Arts. Now, I am studying in MTI in Xi'an Jiaotong University.

I like running, especially sprinting. I forget about everything when I'm running. It also helps me keep fit and feel relaxed. I like to watch TV series in my spare time, including American TV series and Korean and Japanese TV soaps. If time permits, I like to hang out and travel with my friends. I have visited Heilongjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan with my friends. Travel has greatly enriched my life!

I am not sure about the way ahead, but I do have short-term goals. I want to get CATTI1 Certificate for translation and CATTI3 Certificate for interpretation next year. I want to work hard to improve my English speaking and writing abilities. I need to charge myself and be fully prepared for future career.

## ICE CREAM SUMMER

---

**M**other has three sisters. Her eldest sister, Aunt Big, has two children, Shumin and Ruifeng. Aunt Big lives next to our home so I stayed with these two cousins through most of my childhood. Ruifeng is two years older than me and we played with neighbor friends. To some extent, I was his little "follower". We laughed and played together, but sometimes we quarreled and fought.

One hot summer afternoon during the summer holiday, when I was in the first grade of primary school, Ruifeng and I were doing our holiday homework together. The cicadas kept chattering outside the window and with the electronic fan whirling asthmatically over our heads, both of us couldn't concentrate on our work.

Suddenly, Ruifeng said, "Maomao (my nickname), what if we go out and buy some ice cream?"

"Great! I don't want to do homework anyway!" I replied in delight.

We went to Aunt Big to ask permission. "Mom, can we go to the shop and buy some ice cream? Maomao said she wanted to eat Wall's," Ruifeng murmured.

I nodded and looked longingly yet sheepishly at Aunt Big.

"Alright, but each of you can only have one. Come back soon and look out for cars!" Aunt Big agreed and gave us ten yuan.

"Yes!" we squealed and jumped with joy before storming out cheerfully.

"I want the strawberry!"

"Well, I'll take chocolate!" Ruifeng said, handing the cash to the cashier.

We hurried back home. Aunt Big smiled and patted my head.

Ruifeng gobbled his ice cream with appreciative smacking and then asked, "Maomao, is your strawberry ice cream tasty?"

I nodded while nibbling at the ice cream. I hadn't even eaten one-third of it at this point.

"Is it really that tasty? I'm going to have a try!" he said and grabbed it from me.

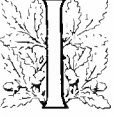
Seeing Ruifeng wolfing down my ice cream rapidly, I couldn't help but crying. I tried to pull his arm and get my ice cream back, but he kept eating shamelessly. In the end, I bit his hand hard, which reduced him to tears.

Aunt Big rushed into the room attracted by the crying. Seeing us sitting on the ground side by side crying, she burst into laughter. After a while, Mom also learned about it and the two laughed uproariously, which made us cry even harder.

Now, though we are grown up, Aunt Big still teases us about that ice cream summer!

## REALIZATIONS

---

 didn't have a pleasant summer holiday this year, although I did not have to do homework or take a part-time job. Mother was ill.

We argued a lot in late July. First, I thought it was because she worried too much about the interior decoration of our house and thus had become frustrated and irritable. I tried being docile but it didn't help. Mother felt discomfort in her abdomen from time to time, which led to a recurrence of hemorrhoids. Medication alone didn't work so we went to a hospital for a medical check. The results were far from optimistic. The doctors suggested immediate surgery.

I was really disappointed by the check-up results and regretted quarreling with Mother. She had not been in good health over the past few years. She was reluctant to have the operation given the risk of surgery and the difficulty of recovery. Our persuasion and encouragement helped change her mind.

Father and I waited outside the operation room for more than two hours, which seemed like a century. It was not until the doctor emerged and told us the neoplasm was completely removed that we were relieved.

Recovery was also worrying. Mother had to stay in the hospital for ten days and she was not allowed to get out of bed. Father and I took turns tending her at night for the first few days. Sometimes I could only sob when I saw her thin, pale cheeks. Mom was mild when she was in the hospital, which made me even more regretful. Fortunately, the day she was about to be discharged from the hospital, the attending doctor said the wound was healing.

Mother's illness upset my holiday plan, but to some extent I am thankful. It made me realize how important my parents are and how important it is to keep a good relationship with them.

## A SHORT STORY

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middle-aged man slumped on the street corner, beer bottles scattered around.

He looked at the street lamp. The dim light hurt his eyes. He lowered his head.

The alcohol was working. Pain in his head came in waves. Drowsiness soon swept over his whole body.

Suddenly, cold wind hit his face as a black sedan sped along the street, throwing up fallen leaves.

"Damn!" he exclaimed, glaring at the car. He rubbed his aching head. Straightening himself, he leaned against the door of the shop.

He gradually gained greater consciousness.

It was going to be a sleepless night.

...

"You always come back home so late! You have no concern for our family! You know how tired I am? I get up early in the morning to prepare breakfast and meal boxes. I have to clear up the toys and do all the chores. You think I am a home-bound idle rich lady?! I'm done with this fucking life!"

"I... I didn't mean it. I had to go drink with the office leaders again. It's part of the job. Dear, I wanted to help, but..." he tried to explain, scratching his head, but only a few words were emitted.

"Stop making lame excuses! Boozing does not lead to promotions! You've been working for six years and you're still a clerk. I'm really proud of you!"

That scathing scolding rang in his ears over and over.

The man pulled his jacket tight and looked at his watch. It was three AM.

"I must work tomorrow," he said with a wry smile. He managed to stand up and headed toward the end of the street.



许欣宜  
Xu Xinyi  
Max

---

**M**y name is Xu Xinyi. My English name is Max. Whenever I tell others my English name, they say "Max" is too boyish for a girl, but I like it. I took "Max" from the American situation comedy, *2 Broke Girls*, in which Max is a waitress who encounters various troubles. I adore her for her sense of humor. She is very good at self-mocking when she is in trouble. I hope I can be as humorous and strong as Max.

I was born in a small village in Xiantao, Hubei Province in 1997. My family consists of my mother, father and me. I studied in the primary school in the village for four years where I had the best time of my life. However, the school was closed for a scarcity of students when I finished fourth grade. Therefore, I and my peers had to go to study in the primary school in our town. I and my friends in the village used to ride bikes to school every day.



After graduating from the primary school, I was sent to junior high school in the county town because the junior high school in the town wasn't good. I stayed in Mother's elder brother home because we didn't have a home in the city. I stayed there for six years through high school. Initially, I felt uncomfortable and inferior to my uncle and aunt because I thought they received me out of sympathy. Actually, they treated me as their daughter, for which I am really grateful. Thousands of careful days and nights with them shaped me into a sensible person. I studied hard in high school and was accepted by Xi'an International Studies University to study translation. This is my fifth year in Xi'an. I regret that I didn't study hard in my undergraduate years. Like most university students in China, I spent most of my time with my phone in the dormitory after class. I really should have read more books. Luckily, I was recommended to XJTU, which meant that I didn't have to take the examination. I regard this as a chance given by the deities for me to study harder and become a better person.

I love singing, especially singing English songs. When I was in high school, I participated in a singing competition held by the school and earned praise from my peers although I didn't get an award. I then became more confident in singing. I liked Taylor Swift because the song I sang in the competition was one of hers. I can sing all of her songs and I often sing them in the dormitory or at a KTV.

I want to be a professional interpreter in the future. This has been my dream since high school. I used to wonder if this was my thing because it is difficult, but now I find I am close to my dream. After two months of studying interpretation in XJTU, I have more confidence in realizing my dream.

## I WON'T SEE HER AGAIN

---

Yesterday evening, I phoned Mother to chat. When I was about to hang up, Mother suddenly astonished me with, "Shu Jing got married this past National Holliday. They didn't have a wedding. Only her family knew about it."

"Why?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"I don't know. Her family has always been weird. I heard that she was pregnant. Maybe her family was ashamed of that," Mother said. "Her parents asked for neither money nor gifts from her husband. They also gave her no wedding gifts."

"It seems like she was given to her husband as an object. Her family didn't treat her like a daughter," I sighed.

Shu Jing was one of my best childhood friends. We lived in a same village and often played together. She was the quietest student in the class and studied extremely hard. Her parents and grandmother didn't like her because she was a girl. Consequently, she developed an inferiority complex.

I often went to Shu's home to do homework and play. There was also another reason: Her mother was going to deliver a second baby soon. It was the first time for me to witness a pregnant woman's changes as her due date neared. I was very curious. It violated the One Child Policy to have a second child, but Shu's family desired a boy. Shu's mother seldom talked with me or smiled, so I only glanced at her belly from time to time while I was playing. One day, I gathered my courage and asked, "When will the baby come?"

"Soon," she said without looking at me.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" I continued.

"A boy," her mother said, smiling.

I looked forward to the boy's arrival.

Several days later, I went to her home again. Her mother had given birth to a baby, which Shu's grandmother was holding.

I excitedly said, "Hello, baby boy! You're so cute!"

"What's his name, Grandma?" I asked.

"It's a girl," Shu's grandmother said with no expression.

"What's her name?" I continued.

"She doesn't have a name. Call her whatever you want."

There was no happiness in their home but I didn't notice. I seemed to be the happiest one. I hugged and kissed the infant. She was so cute and I wished that she was my sister.

A few days later, I went to Shu's home again to see the baby.

"Can I see the baby?" I asked Shu's mother.

"No," she replied.

"Why?" I asked.

"The baby is gone. You won't see her again," she replied coldly.

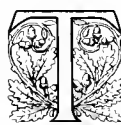
I didn't understand, and I was a little afraid. I went back home and never went to Shu's home again.

Days later, I heard villagers murmur that the little girl had been abandoned by her grandma.

When I and Shu graduated from primary school, her mother delivered another baby girl. Three years later, she had a baby boy.

## A MOMENT ON BUS 313

---

he day before yesterday, I was waiting for Bus 313 at the south gate of our school with earphones on. Two middle-aged men, wearing gray work clothes and cloth shoes, were near me. Both carried canvas bags with hammers. Gray dust covered them from their hair to their feet. I thought they might be migrant workers and I kept some distance from them in fear the dust would stain my new coat.

"Hi! Do you know how to go to Labor Road? Should we take bus 313?"

They looked at the bus stop board for a while and then walked to me. They had a strong accent different from Shaanxi accents. I took a while to understand what they said.

"Yes," I replied, without taking my earphones out.

A few minutes later, the bus came. I got up and used my phone's mobile payment to pay the bus fee. I went to a seat in the back. Only a few people were on the bus. Most seats were empty. The two men got on the bus after me and stood at the front because they had no change or bus cards.

"We have no change. How can we pay the bus fee?" one man asked the bus driver, a clean young man wearing white gloves.

"Do you have WeChat or Alipay? You can scan the payment QR code here with either," he said gently and patiently.

The two men paid successfully with the driver's help.

They walked towards me in the back of the bus. I thought they would sit in front of me. However, to my surprise, they sat on the floor.

"Why?" I wondered. There were many empty seats and they must be very tired after a long day's work.

Noticing them sitting on the floor in the rearview mirror, the young bus driver said loudly, "Sit on the seats! There are a lot of empty seats. The floor is dirty and cold."

"It's fine. Ha-ha. Thank you. Our clothes and hands are dusty. We may dirty these clean seats," one man answered even more loudly.

Sitting alone in the back, I felt ashamed for keeping a distance. I judged others by their appearances which was what our education had been telling me not to do for years.

## SPRING FESTIVAL

---

**H**ow time flies! There is only one month left before Spring Festival. As I'm writing, I can't help thinking about busy and happy time I have with my family in the most important celebration for all Chinese people around the world. Here, I'd like to share with you about how we spend Spring Festival in my hometown.

In my home, each family member is occupied with their own duties at the last day of the last lunar month. In the morning, my father will be responsible for cleaning the outside look of our three-story house by washing the front door, cleaning ceiling, pasting up Spring Festival couplets and hanging red lanterns. And I will stand by him in case he needs a hand. For example, I can carry a table with him, on which he will need to stand when pasting up the couplets, or pass him a duster cloth when he is washing the door. While we are refreshing our house from the outside, Mother will do the cleaning inside the house, such as washing all bed sheets, airing quilts on balcony and mopping the floor.

As for the preparation for the dinner on New Year's Eve, it's traditionally done by my grandmother. Usually, my hometown people have their family reunion meal in the afternoon before the sunset. People will set off fireworks to announce that their meal is ready on table. My grandfather and grandmother live across a river from us. Thus, when Grandmother has done cooking, Grandfather will call us loudly on the riverside. Our family dinner usually begins at two PM to three PM. My uncles, aunts, and cousins who live nearby also will come. There are several fixed dishes: three rich (a complete chicken, duck and fish), three cakes (fish cake, pork cake and beef cake), and three balls (fish-balls, pork-balls, and lotus root balls). Other dishes depend on personal preference.

After the dinner, all men in my family clan will go to our ancestors' tombs in the family field nearby for worshipping; all women will do the dishes and prepare hot water and clean clothes for the whole family shower. I'm usually the first one to have a shower, and then is my mother. When my father

returns, he will be the last one and my mother will wash our clothes.

After all these have been finished, it's about 7 pm. my parents and I will rest on bed or sofa to wait for the Spring Festival Gala Evening of CCTV. Although many Chinese people don't watch it because they think it's boring, it remains as a tradition in my family. At midnight, people set off fireworks in front of their house to celebrate the coming of a new year.

For Chinese people, the first day of the first lunar month marks the beginning of a new year. At this special day, kids get up early to pay New Year calls to seniors of father clan and they will get some red envelopes from grandparents and father's brothers. On the second day, parents will take their children to pay New Year calls to seniors of mother clan. From the second day to the fifteenth day, people often visit their relatives or rest at home. The fifteenth day of the first lunar month is the Lantern Festival, marking the end of the Spring Festival.



薛敏  
Xue Min  
Zoey

---

**M**y name is Xue Min, and you can also call me by my English name, Zoey. The reason why I picked this name as my English name lays in its meaning, because I have learned that it means life and happiness in ancient Hebrew.

I was born and grow up in Yangling, a small town which is about eighty kilometers from Xi'an. There are four people in my family. My parents are running a pharmacy, which keeps them busy all the time. And I have a younger brother who just entered middle school. Despite the age gap between us, we two get along well with each other. In addition, my home also keeps a supremely adorable cat, who has brought so much fun to us.

At present, I am studying translation and interpreting in Xi'an Jiaotong University. Before I come to this university to study as a post-graduate student, I have worked in Decathlon, a big sports supermarket, for almost a year. I gained a lot there,




I made nice friends, tried new sports and also got to know how important for one to have a sense of responsibility. After I quit my job, I went traveling for a month with the salary I earned myself.

I love sports very much, especially running and swimming. In my spare time, I often go to the gym, because it can help me keep fit and it is also a good way to relax and relieve stress.

Now I'm experiencing this new journey of being a student, I hope I can seize this opportunity to improve myself both internally and externally, and always bear in mind my dream of being a professional translator. Hopefully, in the near future, my dream could come true and I can serve as a competent translator and live a better life.

## CICADA CATCHERS

---


lmost every summer holiday before my paternal grandmother passed away, I returned to my ancestral home where she and Grandpa lived. My parents were busy running a pharmacy. It was a relief for them to send me to my grandparents during the long vacation. This idea couldn't have been better for me, because my grandparents lived in a large village full of many interesting and fun things, like catching and eating cicadas.

I was a happy child in those days, living in the countryside. In August, I and some other kids, didn't need afternoon naps. After lunch we all came out of our homes and gathered in the scorching weather and usually went to the sloping side of a hill located behind the village. According to the annoying singing emanating from different directions, we divided into several groups of two or three kids each. We made careful movements and lowered our voices in fear the cicadas would escape. Those good at climbing were responsible for catching cicadas, while other team members stood under the trees to pass on a fishing net attached to a stick, and offer other help. I stood under the trees, watching everything. After a while, we came back with a good harvest.

Older kids asked the newcomers, including me, to gather some bricks and dry wheat straw from the fields. I saw kids taking cicadas from a bucket and putting them in the middle of a wheat straw mound, and then encircling the mound with several bricks, leaving only a one-inch-wide gap to ventilate the burning straw at the bottom. About fifteen minutes after the fire had died out and the wheat straw had turned to ash, the cicadas were to eat. To make these delicacies more delicious, we flavored them with chili powder and salt brought from our homes. At the beginning, I was afraid to eat them, however, I didn't want to be a killjoy, so I tried. I found they were tasty with tender flesh and spicy flavor. I will always cling to and savor this memory.

## LONGING FOR UNCLE

---

 never met Xue Jianrong, my father's older brother, but I heard a lot about him from Grandmother before she passed away.

Grandmother had four children. Aunt Xue Xiangqun is the eldest and Father is the youngest among his siblings. He has two older brothers, Uncle Xue Jianguo and Uncle Xue Jianrong.

Aunt Xue Xiangqun and Uncle Xue Jianguo always have treated me well, like I was one of their own children. But I only heard stories about Uncle Xue Jianrong from Grandmother.

One hot summer, the bell clanged and everyone rushed out of the classroom, including Uncle Xue Jianrong. He was excited by the idea of eating dumplings with pork filling at home, which his mother had promised him that morning. He rode his bicycle fast while heading home. At the village gate, one kilometer from home, an old truck was rumbling down the dirt road from the opposite direction. It struck his bicycle and crushed it, and then the truck fled without stopping. Fortunately, Uncle Jianrong came away from the accident with only cuts and scrapes.

"He was so blessed by the god that I worship, otherwise, he wouldn't have escaped death," Grandmother said. She said this every time she related this story to someone who hadn't heard it.

"But in the end, he is still dead. It must be my fault. I should have visited church every Sunday. He was just so smart and hardworking. If he were alive, he would have lived a better life than all of us," she would conclude and begin quietly sobbing.

One hot summer, Uncle Xue Jianrong went swimming in the river near the town with three of his friends. He never came back. He died at the age of seventeen, a wonderful period for a boy.

Father was too young to remember this sad event, and I never heard about it from Uncle Xue Jianguo or from Aunt Xue Xiangqun. Now that my grandparents are both gone, I

guess there is no one who remembers what Uncle Jianrong looked like.

I sometimes see him in my dreams, although his face is unclear.

## LOST COUSINS

---

**M**y grandparents and my uncle's family lived together in the village when I was little. My parents were busy doing business, I went back every year to spend my summer and winter holidays with them. It was a big family. My uncle's family consisted of my aunt, my uncle, and their three children. Together with my grandparents and I, eight people lived in three rooms in a house. Every evening before we went to bed, we gathered in a room with a black-and-white television to watch TV programs, chat and play cards. One night, as usual, we were sitting on the bed watching TV. Suddenly, Aunt burst into tears.

"What happened?" I asked in confusion.

"Sorry," she said, wiping away her tears with the back of her hands. She said nothing more but moved quickly towards the television.

I looked at the TV. A mother had left her newborn baby at the gate of an orphanage.

"We gave two of our children to others a dozen years ago," Uncle explained, seeing my puzzlement.

"Two children? Why? I actually have two more cousins?"

"They were girls. We already had two girls. We were heavily fined for violating government policy. We couldn't bear more fines," Aunt said in a low voice, her eyes downcast.

"I'm also a girl. I help my parents do housework and I try my best to study to make them proud. Girls care for their parents better than boys. Why must people have a son? I don't get it!" I replied angrily.

"We have a saying, 'The more sons you have, the better life you have,'" Grandmother sighed in answer. "Men are stronger and can do more work."

I was speechless, but I didn't want to argue. I didn't agree, but this idea was deeply rooted in her mind and the minds of other villagers.


In the village, many parents named their daughters 招弟 Zhaodi (Brother Hailed) or 想弟 Xiangdi (Brother Desired), which I find offensive. When I asked my friend, Xue Zhaodi, about this, she said, "I don't blame them for wanting a son,

because everyone in the village wants that. I will no longer live with and look after them after I get married, so it's better for them to have a son to keep them company when they are old."



姚景熙  
Yao Jingxi  
Jocelyn

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 I'm Yao Jingxi and my English name is Jocelyn. My first name, Jingxi, suggests a promising, thriving future for me. I was born in Baoji, Shaanxi Province on 24 January 1996. I'm assiduous, focused and pressure-resistant. My character is strongly shaped by my father who is a military official. He has taught me to be an avid reader and to learn as if I'll live forever.

I'm willing to take challenges. I participated in many extra-curricular activities including English speaking contests and English debates. I like making friends through competition and cooperation. I love English and enjoy the confidence when I speak it. That's why I chose to further my study in Xian Jiaotong University in Master of Translation and Interpreting Program.


I hope to engage in career related to overseas marketing. My character is the greatest strength in this field and my English capability will be utilized to the best advantage. I want what I've learned to be fully applied to my future career.

I cherish what I possess: my family, my friends and my supervisors. They are the most invaluable treasure in my life. It is their support and care that makes me who I am.



## SWEET AND SOUR BATTLEFIELDS

---

ne week remained before the National College Entrance Examination, known as the Gaokao. Everyone was extremely busy doing exercises and memorizing textbooks. pages rustled and electronic fans hummed. Our blackboard said, "Fight for the Gaokao! Succeed in the Future!"

Our school held a grand ceremony to energize us. Nearly 1,700 students stood in the school square as the headmaster gave an encouraging, uplifting speech, extorting us to swear to the national flag, "We are fighters! We will succeed in the Gaokao! We will win honor for our school!"

Three days later, our head teacher took us to the testing center and gave us time to learn the location of the restrooms and classrooms where we would take the exam. When we returned to school, we started to pack our books and other daily use articles. We would then stay at home to relax to relieve our stress and produce higher Gaokao's result. We said goodbye to each other and agreed to have a class party after the exam.

My parents avoided mentioning anything related to the Gaokao, so as not to pressure me. They cooked light food and we walked to a nearby park after supper. Mom even allowed me to watch TV and play computer games, which had previously been taboo.

Dad woke me up the next morning so we could visit Shigu Temple for a blessing. Parents commonly took their children to pray at the temple before the Gaokao, hoping the deities would bless their children and help them succeed. Dad bought a huge bundle of joss sticks and lit them. He knelt, holding the burning sticks, and asked me to kowtow. After this sacred ritual, we stood and inserted sticks in incense ash. "You will do well on the Gaokao," Father intoned.

My home was far from the testing center, so my parents reserved a room in a hotel nearby. We arrived the day before the Gaokao. "Remember your admission card and ID card!" Dad repeatedly reminded me.

The next morning, my parents escorted me to the crowded, noisy testing center. People were jammed outside the gate. Security personnel struggled to maintain order. I hugged my parents and said, "I want to eat sweet and sour pork fillet for lunch!"

Dad laughed while Mom urged me to leave.

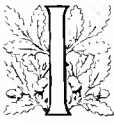
"We'll wait for you here. Good luck, my good girl!" they hailed, striking a victory pose.

I did well on the Gaokao. When I emerged, I saw Mom holding a bunch of flowers. She hugged me, kissed me on the cheeks, and said, "Here you are! Every Gaokao student is a hero!"

I slept well that night and dreamed about fighting on a battlefield.

## WOBBLY DESK

---



It was a quarter past two in the afternoon. Everyone was waiting for the teacher. Outside the window, a line of exuberant trees cast large areas of shades.

Some students were chatting, others were drowsy.

My desk wobbled slightly. I sat bolt upright. I turned around to see our monitor, Ma Jie. He was playing with his desk-mate and didn't notice.

"Maybe I'm imagining," I said.

Another slight shook. I was nervous and the word "earthquake" rushed to my mind. There was silence. No one moved. "Earthquake!" Ma Jie shouted, jumping off his stool and squeezing his corpulent body into the small space under his desk. However, his behavior was more like a funny performance than a survival choice. I heard him giggling.

We were stunned and remained on our stools until our teacher rushed in and shouted, "Run to the playground! Quick!"

We moved in a doubtful way, trotting down the stairs. My desk-mate, Sun Jiao, held my arm and said, "Strange."

At the corner of the stairs, I met Ma Jie. He was helping teachers evacuate students. Seeing me, he joked, "Don't cry loudly."

I hit his back and trotted with Sun Jiao.

Shortly afterwards, everyone was on the playground and the teacher were counting the number of students. We were sitting side by side, wondering if it was really an earthquake. A few minutes later, a student said in a trembling voice, "Wenchuan County was hit by a 7.8 magnitude quake."

I didn't know what 7.8 meant and where Wenchuan County was. Suddenly, Sun Jiao cried out, tears pouring down across her cheeks, "My mom is at home! She's on the twenty-fourth floor!"

I was frightened and didn't know how to calm her. I patted Sun on her back and said, "Your mom will come here to pick you! I promise!"

Suddenly, I thought of my parents. Where were they? Were they safe? I didn't have my cell phone. Sun Jiao was still sobbing.

Our teacher walked up and pointed to the high-rise where Sun's mom lived and said, "Sun Jiao! Look! That building is standing firm. Your mom is safe. Be brave girl!"

Sun slowly calmed and silently waited for her mom.

Xiao Su, my best friend, found me. I was glad that she was now with me. "Yao. I'm worried about my mom. I miss her," she said quietly and bit her lip.

I held her hands and said, "Don't worry! Your home is far from here. I'll bet your mom felt nothing."

I was too ignorant to know the power of earthquakes. In retrospect, I am happy I didn't unnerve Xiao Su.

Communication was on and off for a while. Teachers were busy contacting our parents, because students could only leave with their parents' escort. Sun Jiao was anxiously pacing back and forth. I looked at her and hoped her mom could come soon.

A vague figure appeared at the school gate. It came nearer. "Dad!" I shouted and rushed to hug him. "Where's Mom?" I said.

"She'll be here in a few minutes." Dad said to my relief.

Dad wrote down my name and left his phone number in the register book. As we were leaving, I didn't dare look at Sun Jiao, who was still waiting for her mom. I hugged Xiao Su goodbye and said, "Call me when you get home."

I left with my parents, holding their hands tightly and felt so secure and safe. Nothing could frighten me.

## *SHEHUO'S PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE*

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he authors gave us a broad view of *shehuo* in Xiachuankou Village, Qinghai Province. It is celebrated during the Spring Festival from the seventh to the sixteenth days when specific performances are given to liven things up. Although *shehuo* is a traditional superstitious activity, it has practical significance in modern times.

*Shehuo* is closely related to ancient sacrificial activity. Our forebears created various deities, trying to explain natural phenomenon which were beyond their knowledge. When it comes to agricultural civilization, people besought blessings from once-created deities to protect them from crop failure or natural calamity. *Shehuo*, originally as a sacrificial activity, develops into a huge, benedictional festival. People dress up and actively participate in *shehuo* for bounteous harvests and an affluent life.

Traditional gender inequality can be seen in *shehuo*. According to its organization, *shehuo* participants are all male. Families who do not have a young man at home to participate have to send ten to twenty *yuan* to the *shehuo* committee. Female characters in *shehuo* performances are acted out by men. There are two reasons for forbidding women. Traditional mindset is one. Females were vulnerable and dependent, inferior to male. Under the context of patriarchal society, women were responsible for household chores and couldn't engage in external intercourse.

Feudal ethical codes is another. According to basic Confucian values, men and women are not allowed to touch each other's hands when passing objects, let alone to have body contact in crowded, boisterous *shehuo* when body contact is inevitable.

*Shehuo* delivers moral lessons that remain unchanged throughout the years. In the section of horseman, the official representing Chenghuang, protector of towns and villages in legend, punishes people who are reportedly not filial to their parents or are quarrelsome brothers. This punishment, which is in jest, conveys the importance of filial piety and friendly

brotherhood. In the part of minor performances, the old man and his wife section has us establish mutually supportive awareness in married life. In the past, *shehuo* performers were the poorest villagers specially chosen by the two village leaders, so that the poor could receive food and gifts from the crowd. What's more, impoverished family could only contribute tea and extremely poor people could borrow the remaining money that was collected for *shehuo*. These measures were all aimed to help people in distress.

Fine tradition should be adopted and passed down from generation to generation. Modernity gives us too much convenience to establish close interpersonal relationship while *shehuo*, a traditional joyous gathering, offers us an opportunity to socialize and entertain. However, *shehuo*'s practical significance is far beyond social intercourse. There are three points worth noting.

Awe of Nature. *Shehuo* was once forbidden by the government for its superstitious nature, however, people were indeed reliant for nature to feed themselves and attempted every means to delight the gods to guarantee an auspicious life. Thus, people in the past embraced a very respectful attitude towards nature. Nowadays, many countries boost their economies at the expense of damaging environment, which in turn pay heavy price for their ignorance to the ecological reconstruction. We don't need to submit to mighty nature, however, it is necessary to build an equal, environment-friendly relationship with nature.

The importance of support and participation. *Shehuo* is a social gathering with huge popularity and active participation where its performers aren't paid and are voluntarily engaged. However, this event faces a decline in recent years. People prefer to watch festivals on TV and have an increasing conscious about time utilization, which can boil down to estrangement and selfishness prevalent in modern society. *Shehuo* and other traditional events should be preserved and cherished, as part of our effort to strengthen interpersonal relationship and establish our cultural identity.

Value of sharing. *Shehuo* attaches importance to sharing. Each family in Xiachuankou village is willing to contribute to *shehuo*, be it money, food or drink, because one local measure

of a village's status is how well *shehuo* is performed. It is people's sense of sharing that makes *shehuo* blossom. Sharing extends its meaning to tolerance, friendliness and openness, which later develops into the concept of a community of shared future for mankind. We are all interconnected and should learn to share rather than seeking hegemony. In other words, we need to build a higher sense of sharing than ever before in intertwined global village.

*Shehuo* is only a traditionally regional activity, but what we learn from it reaches far beyond its original meaning.



张雪薇  
Zhang Xuewei  
Olivia

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**I** am Zhang Xuewei, born in Weinan, Shaanxi Province. I have traveled between Weinan and Xi'an at least once a month since I was thirteen when I chose to study in Xi'an.

I attended Fulun Middle School at the age of fifteen. I was enrolled in Shaanxi Xi'an High School. After the Gaokao, I got admission to Northwest University of Political Science and Law with a major in Economics. I am now a graduate student in Xi'an Jiaotong University, majoring in translation and interpretation.

In the future, I will get an MA in translation and interpretation and I hope to become a translator or an interpreter for a large-scale company. Larger companies usually have advanced management and can provide employees a good platform for personal development.


Being a translator or an interpreter has always been my dream, and now I am taking steps to fulfill this dream. No



matter what happens in the future, I hope I can stay true to myself and never give up.

## A LONELY BIKE

---

ast week, my maternal grandfather died. The funeral was held on the third day after his death. Almost every family returned, whether from Zhengzhou, Qinghai, or Shanghai, to the village in Shaanxi Province where he had lived for most of his life.

My cousin, Xinxin, whose mother is my mother's elder sister, came back from Shanghai on Friday. We used to spend almost every summer holiday in Grandfather's village together in our childhood. Each time we met, we chatted with joy and excitement, but not this time.

On the way back from the funeral home, no one in the car talked. Everyone was looking outside the windows.

"Do you remember this road?" Xinxin broke the silence, pointing out of the window. "When we were little, Grandfather used to pick us up from home along this road."

"Yes," I replied. "You came to my home first every summer holiday, and Grandfather rode his bicycle carrying both of us. I usually sat on the rear seat and you on the frame."

"You were always complaining, waiting to sit on the frame," she said. We both smiled.

"It was a privilege to sit on the frame, closer to Grandfather," I said as tears filled my eyes.

The car fell silence as we returned to our memories of times with Grandfather.

Grandfather was a teacher and often taught us to recite ancient Chinese poems and sometimes to sing folk songs. The sounds of our singing and recitations filled the bumpy country roads.

The car stopped. We got off to attend the next funeral ritual. I saw Grandfather's bicycle leaning against the wall, a sad reminder of his final departure.

## A MISGUIDED TOPPLE

---

When I was in primary school, the annual sports meetings were between classes in the same grade. In my school, there were only two classes in a grade, so the school leaders thought it was too exhausting to hold a sports' meeting every year. So a sports meeting was only held once every three years.

When I was seven, it was held but I had little memory of it. As time went by, I often heard from friends from other schools that their school held sports meetings every year and I was envious. I was hoping for another sports meeting. When I was ten, finally came the long-awaited second sports meeting.

All of my schoolmates had a great time and everyone participated in different ways: some played games while others cheered. The last event was a ragement. Those not participating were ready to shout out enough to cheer them on. I wanted to do something special, so I decided to write some encouraging notes and send them to the school radio station, which was set up on a stage. In this way, everyone could hear my cheers.

Although I was not very good at writing, I tried my best to write some powerful words as I watched the athletes competing. When I finished writing, the match was about to end. I had to run and run fast. I clutched the notes and planned to run behind the crowd to take notes to the radio station.


Many people were lining on the side of the playground. Some even stood on the stage. I ran all the way while watching the competition. There was a strong boy pulling the rope really hard. I nervously and urgently took the notes. Our class team members were trying their best. They pulled with red, sweaty faces. This encouraged me to run faster.

As I ran to the stage, the crowd suddenly let out a roar. The only thought in my head was to take the notes and I didn't notice the crowd moving. I then accidently staggered and fell from the stage.

The next thing I knew was that I was sent to hospital. When I opened my eyes, my teacher was there too. She told me that our class had won the competition.

## A MOMENT

---

t was cloudy, typical for north China in winter. Grey clouds seemed like pieces of cloth covering the whole city. A bird hovered, landed on a bald tree whose leaves had been blown off a month earlier. Two lines of trees marked the roads. The strong, freezing wind silenced passengers and the whole campus.

In the classroom, there was an examination, and everyone was concentrating on the paper. Except me.

I seemed to act like other students, sitting, holding a pen. But I was the only one who knew the truth. I was terribly nervous. I looked at the clock on the front wall of the classroom. Five minutes left. Not enough for me to answer the last question by that I had been stuck on for three minutes. I began sweating. My sticky palm made it difficult to hold the pen steadily. I peeped at the student next to me. With a frown, she was trying her best to write as fast as she could. I moved to my paper and read the question again, but failed to understand.

"Three minutes left. Check your name and examination number," intoned the invigilator.

"Nevermind," I thought, "just write some related formula."

But I couldn't help to tremble. My shaking hands, sticky palm combined the slippery pen, made it harder to write. Everything I wrote showed my tension. The words seemed to jump out of the paper, my paper thus turned into a mess.

The bell rang.

"Time's up," said the invigilator. "Stop writing and stand up. After I collect your papers, you can leave."

I put down my pen and followed the instructions.

As soon as I left the building, my friend saw me. "How was the exam?"

I didn't answer. It had begun to snow.



张悦婷  
Zhang Yueting  
Effy

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**I**'m Zhang Yueting. My English name is Effy. My Chinese name was given by my father. Yue in Chinese means happiness. He wants me to be a positive, happy person. I come from Qingyang, located in the east of Gansu Province. My home is not very far from Xi'an. It only takes three hours to my home by car.

Before entering university, I lived and studied in Qingyang. In 2017, I graduated from Southern Medical University, located in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. My major was Business English. Now I am an interpreting major student at Xi'an Jiaotong University.

I want to be an interpreter or a translator in the future, or do jobs related to English. So a major task for me now is to improve my English as well as professional skills.

## REFLECTION: *AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER*

---


hat is happiness? Opinions vary. Most people think happiness is some sort of subjective pleasant sensation and something people feel inside themselves. Many things will bring us happiness, such as money, marriage and health. Some people think happiness consists in seeing one's life in its entirety as meaningful and worthwhile. Some religions and philosophies hold very different ideas. Buddhism thinks true happiness is independent of external conditions as well as inner feelings they think people feel happy when not when they experience the fleeting pleasure, but rather when they understand the impermanent nature of those ephemeral feelings and stop craving them.

I understand what Buddhism advocates. As the Chinese saying goes, "Not pleased by external gains, not saddened by personal losses." We shouldn't pay much attention to the gain and loss of external parameters such as money, appearance, or power. All of these issues are changing every moment. What they bring us is immediate pleasure not long-term happiness. However, it is difficult for the average person to reach such a state of mind. Most of us definitely feel happy or sorrow because of the changes of the outside world. So I think it is more crucial for us to know how to make us feel happy inside ourselves.

How to become happier? Most important is finding contentment in our life. Being satisfied with what we already have is far more important than getting more of what we want. Even we get what we have wanted for a long time, we will have new goals then. For example, when we are sick, health is what we want most. But when we get well, we will have another new expectation, such as wealth. Endless expectations will not bring us happiness. Contentment with what we already have is very important for us to become happier.

## BOY BOOK BURGLAR

---

hen I graduated from senior high school, I had a two-month vacation. I took a part-time job in the New Reading Bookstore as a clerk. My job was to mind the shop, which covered an area of thirty square meters. It had many bookshelves and was well stocked with all kinds of books.

One day when there were very few people in bookstore, it was hot and I felt tired. A boy came in and said, "I want to buy a book." He was about ten years old, wearing an old but clean blue coat and black shorts.

"What book?" I asked.

He did not answer and seemed nervous. I had often met such children who were too shy to say much, especially to strangers. I asked again, "What's the title of the book?"

"I've forgotten. Can I just look around and think for a while?"

"Certainly."

He walked around, picking up one book at random reading a bit, then choosing another. It seemed that he needed a long time to decide which book to buy. I ignored him and started fiddling with my cell phone.

Out of habit, I periodically looked at the surveillance camera display on the computer monitor. He stood in a corner where I could only see him on the screen. He did nothing but look around. Suddenly, he put a book in his coat secretly. Shocked and angry, I could not believe that such a lovely boy was a thief.

"What did you do. How dare you!" I said.

"I didn't... I didn't do anything," he replied, hanging his head.

"What's it in your coat?" I demanded.

He held the book in his coat tightly, said nothing, and then started sobbing.

"I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. Grandpa is a street sweeper. I don't want to spend his money to buy a book. He works very hard but earns very little money. I'm sorry," he said. He didn't



look at me and continued hanging his head. He took the book out of his coat, handed it to me and tried to run out.

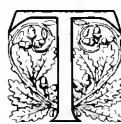
I stopped him and said, "I want to buy this book for you, but you must promise you won't do this again."

He raised his head and looked me in the eye. He stopped crying and said, "I'm really sorry. Please forgive me."

He then, ran out quickly and never looked back.

## RED JUJUBES

---

he year he was six years old, his father was a respected professor in Heilu University in Heilu City. He was criticized, persecuted, and Red Guards brutally took him away. He didn't see his father for a long time. People came to his home and persuaded his mother to end her relationship with his father. She listened silently. After a while, his mother sent him to live with his grandma. He did not want to leave his mother but she left him when he was sleeping. His grandma told him that his mother had gone to be with his father.

He then lived in the countryside with his grandma. Many jujube trees grew on a mountain to the north of the village. The trees and the mountain were quite red. He had no friends, so he had little to do. Day after day, he climbed the mountain and slept under the red jujube trees.

One day, when he woke up, a long-haired girl dressed in red sat near him, holding some red jujubes. "Here you are. They are sweet," she said handing him some jujubes.

He was hungry and gobbled the jujubes without a word. When he finished, she was gone.

Later, his grandma told him the girl was Xiao Hong, who had once had a fiancé. Both were kind and friendly. Later, her fiancé fell from a cliff and died. Nobody knew exactly what had happened. When his corpse was found, it was red with blood and covered with jujubes. Xiao Hong stared at his body, said nothing. She did not cry, but collected the jujubes on his body. She became insane and often sat at the edge of the cliff, holding red jujubes. People worried that she might jump from the cliff, but she didn't. As time passed, she received less and less attention.

When his father was rehabilitated, he returned to Heilu City, but Xiao Hong stayed in his mind. Several years later, he returned to the countryside but could not find her. He heard that Xiao Hong had fallen from the cliff and died. Nobody knew if she had fallen from the cliff by accident or on purpose. Did anyone care? Her humble grave was on the mountain with a jujube tree to one side.